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155 plucked to safety by rescue services

On the rocks: sea claims yet another klondyker

by Alistair Munro

SHETLAND'S emergency air and sea rescue services have earned praise from all sides for rescuing 155 crew-members from the Russian factory ship *Pionersk* which, in storm force winds early on Monday morning, grounded on the south-west tip of the Ness of Trebister, two miles south of Lerwick.

And while the pollution from the wreck was washing onto the shores of Gulberwick and the Sands of Sound yesterday afternoon, the Government finally announced it was going to take some action on the klondyker problem next year.

This is the third time in less than 12 months that the services of Shetland Coastguard's rescue helicopter and the Lerwick Lifeboat *Soldian* have been called upon to carry out heroic evacuations from grounded klondykers. So far, no life has been lost.

But this latest incident has once again raised questions about the safety of the factory ships clustered in and around the harbour.

Shipping Minister Lord Goschen was expected to face a tough grilling from various organisations when he arrived in Shetland today.

However, yesterday he announced that the existing licensing system for klondykers was to be tightened up, but not until the 1995 herring season.

Shetland Islands Council convener Lewis Smith said the SIC had consistently pressed the Government to take action.

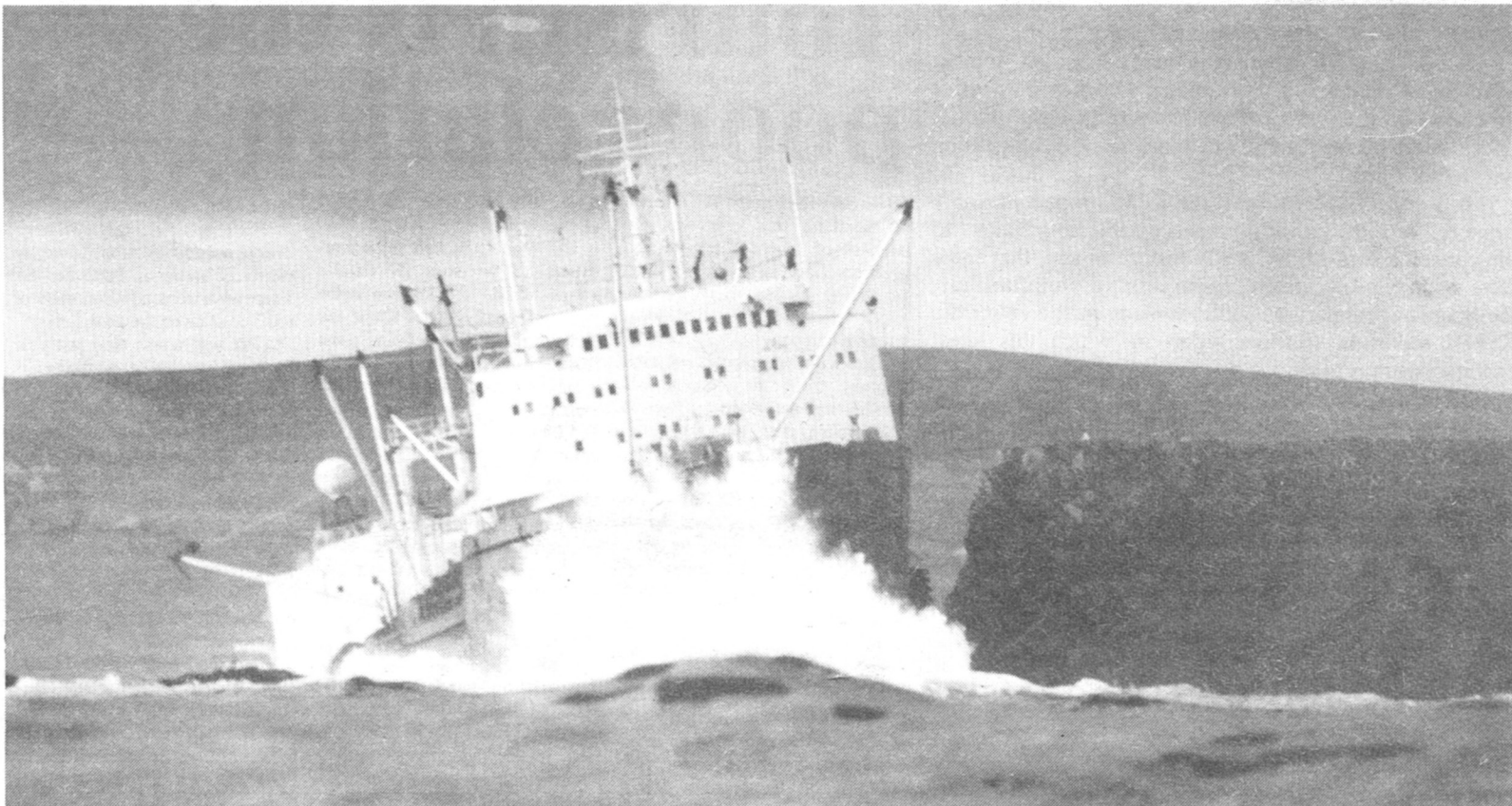
Shetland Coastguard received a call from the 10,074 tonne, 166-metre Kaliningrad-registered *Pionersk* at 1am, just 44 minutes before low tide. She had already drifted through the stormy seas and foundered high on the rocks when the call for assistance was made.

When Shetland Coastguard received the call at 1am, the weather was very poor, and there was gale force eight to severe gale force nine winds, gusting to storm force 10 at times.

The *Soldian* and the Sum-burgh-based rescue helicopter were called out, and the harbour trust tugs *Knab* and *Kebister* were requested to provide assistance. Lerwick's auxiliary coastguards were also alerted and went to the scene.

Within half-an-hour both the helicopter and *Soldian* were at the *Pionersk* taking off the crew.

Apart from dealing with the wind factor and the large number of crew, the rescue was made particularly difficult for the heli-



The *Pionersk* takes a beating on the rocks on Monday.

Photo: Ian Leask

copter and lifeboat crews when the generator failed after the hull was holed and water entered the engine room. This resulted in no lighting at all, as well as communications being reduced to the captain using a hand-held transceiver — "not the perfect situation in a difficult rescue", Shetland Coastguard's district staff officer for operations, Les Snaith, said.

By 3am more than two thirds of

the crew had been safely taken ashore by both lifeboat and helicopter. The harbour pilot boats managed to get lines aboard the vessel, but it soon became clear that there was substantial damage to the hull and that water had entered the holds. The salvage attempt was abandoned and efforts went into rescuing the remaining crew on board.

The *Soldian*, under command

of coxswain Hewitt Clark, made over 70 approaches to pluck 67 crew from the stricken vessel as she yawed violently back and forth while stuck on the rocks. Honorary secretary of Lerwick lifeboat Magnus Shearer said the coxswain had to manoeuvre the lifeboat around the stern of the klondyker and edge in between her and the rocky shoreline. The high winds were causing a heavy swell and surge between the vessel and the shore.

All 67 men were taken back to Lerwick Harbour at 3.15am, just two hours after the vessel had grounded. Mr Shearer said it was the largest number of survivors carried on board the Arun-class *Soldian*.

The *Soldian* then returned to the scene and stood by as the remaining crew were airlifted off the *Pionersk*.

The rescue helicopter operated by Bristow Helicopters made nine trips between the klondyker and Clickimin landing site, carrying a total of 88 crew.

The headcount began once all the crew had been taken to the fishermen's mission on Harbour Street. Not until all 155 men and women had been accounted for were the helicopter and lifeboat stood down, at about 4.30am.

Mr Snaith said: "When I told the crew there were 155 on board and 155 had been counted there

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Faults found on *Pionersk*

THE WRECKED klondyker was one of 64 factory ships in Lerwick and Peterhead which have been found to have serious faults.

The Department of Transport's Marine Safety Agency has inspected 107 vessels in Lerwick and 10 in Peterhead since the beginning of July. Out of these 55 per cent (64) had major deficiencies.

MSA chief surveyor Frank Duffin said nine faults had been found on the *Pionersk* when she was inspected in Peterhead in August. Two of these were major defects involving the emergency generator and emergency lighting.

Capt Duffin said these may not have contributed to the grounding, but could have hindered the escape and rescue of crew.

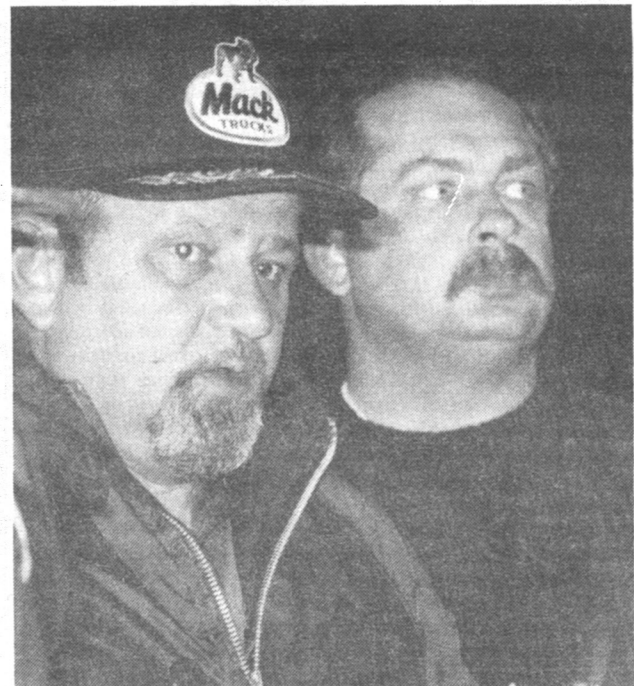
The 64 vessels found with major deficiencies, including the *Pionersk*, would have been prohibited from sailing until repairs were carried out had they been in port. As it was only four ships were detained, including two Bulgarian klondykers currently berthed at the

OIL base. Three Bulgarian klondykers in Ullapool have also been inspected and detained.

The main problem with sub-standard klondykers is that the owners have not got the money to carry out repairs and maintenance, while another reason is that many crews are not being paid and do not have the incentive for maintenance.

The inspections of factory ships began last November following two serious groundings in Lerwick, involving the *Lunohods* and *Borodinskoye Polye*. The question of klondyker safety was included in Lord Donaldson's inquiry, which came in light of the *Braer* tanker disaster last January.

Lord Donaldson made several recommendations when his report — *Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas* — was published in May. This included regular MSA inspections, which the Department of Transport implemented immediately. Other recommendations, which linked fish shipment licences to minimum seaworthiness standards, have not.



The captain of the *Pionersk* (left) talks to his crew minutes after the rescue.

Photo: Graeme Storey

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Inquiry begins into cause

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was spontaneous applause. I was quite taken aback by that."

As Shetlanders were coming to terms with the news of yet another klondyker disaster on Monday morning, and police were preventing onlookers from using the Gulberwick loop road, many of the *Pionersk* crew were returning to their wrecked ship to claim belongings, including televisions and videos.

Later that day, at about noon, Captain Vladimirovich Kovalchuk Diomid and his crew gathered at the slip beside Victoria Pier to be transferred to other factory ships in Lerwick which are owned by the same Kaliningrad owner as the *Pionersk*.

The remainder of the week was taken up with tackling the pollution.

What happened to the *Pionersk* before 1am on Monday is still the subject of some speculation but various unofficial sources are putting the accident down to captain error.

As the storm on Sunday night gathered momentum, the *Pionersk* decided to head for safer waters out at sea. It is understood the vessel, which had been anchored close to the Ness of Trebister for some time, attempted to lift her anchor. The chain had apparently twisted with the movement of the ship.

Capt Frank Duffin, district chief surveyor for the Department of Transport's (DTp) Marine Safety Agency — which had discovered nine faults on the klondyker, all non-attributable to the grounding, during an inspection in August — said lifting a twisted anchor was "a hell of a job" and the master seemingly attempted to manoeuvre the vessel to untwist the anchor chain.

It is thought the anchor then broke and the captain "obviously had not realised how close to the shore he really was".

According to Lerwick Harbour



The Lerwick lifeboat arrives packed with crew from the *Pionersk*.

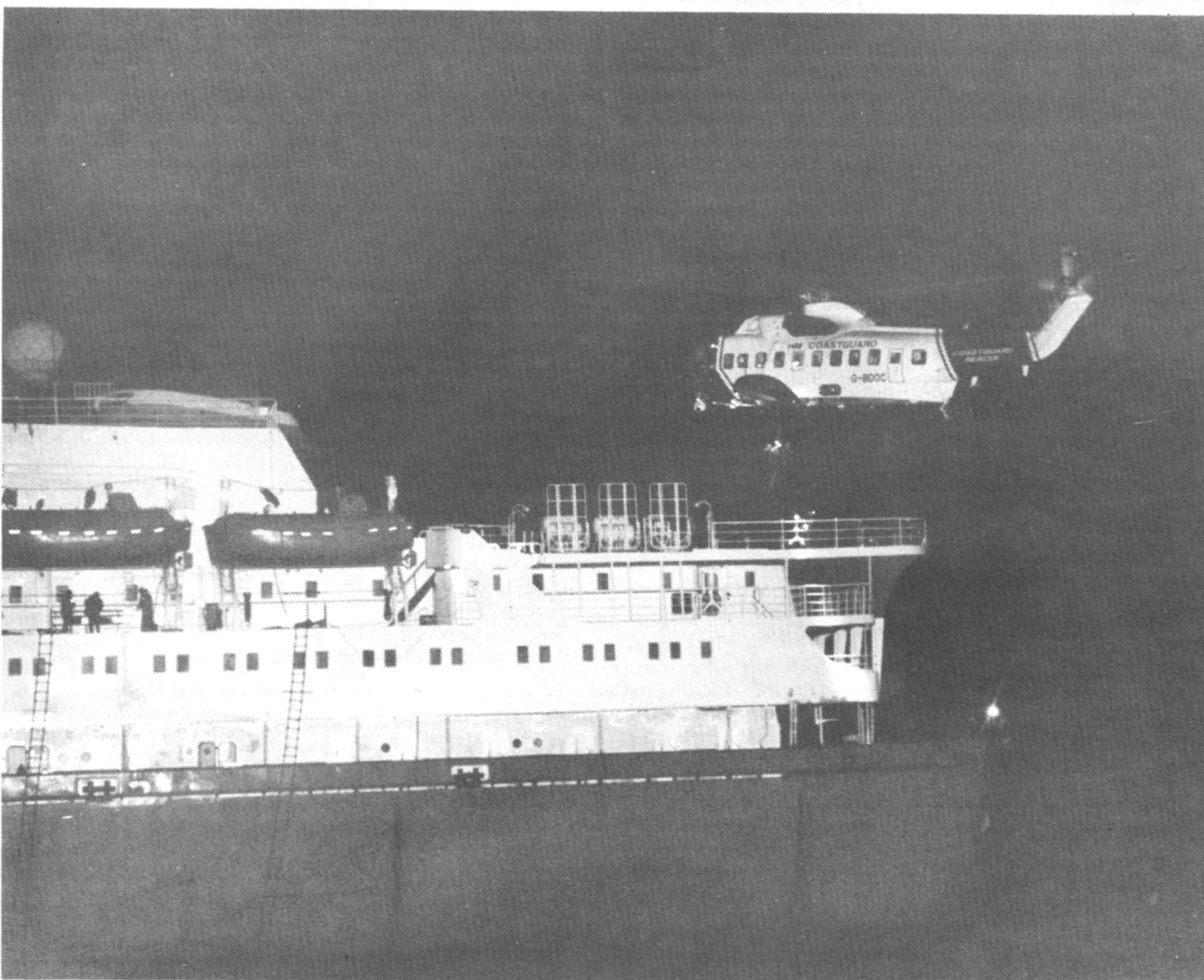
Photo: Ian Leask

Trust general manager Allan Wishart, the captain had told him "the storm came up very suddenly, and far more severe than forecast" and he had been surprised at the strength of wind.

Crewman Alexander Shikhov, from Kaliningrad, claimed the vessel had been hit by two large waves, the strength of which he claims broke the anchor.

There are many questions to be answered about the incident, and they will be asked by inspectors from the DTp's Marine Accidents Investigation Branch who arrived in Shetland on Tuesday to interview the *Pionersk*'s captain, and other ship officers, in an attempt to ascertain what exactly happened.

● The 31-year-old *Pionersk*, at 166 metres and with 155 crew, was one of the largest klondykers anchored within Lerwick Harbour limits. She has been a frequent visitor to Lerwick since 1988 and her arrival on 1st October was her fourth this year.



The rescue helicopter makes one of her nine trips to take off crew.

Photo: Malcolm Younger

'The Government should declare straight away that from a specified date, well before next winter, the Fisheries Departments will not consider any application for a trans-shipment licence unless the master concerned produces evidence that his vessel is adequately insured and reaches minimum safety standards' — Lord Donaldson's report [May] Recommendation 77 (f).



Rescued . . . one of the crew is helped out of his harness by winch operator Dave Ellis after being taken aboard.

Photo: Graeme Storey

'On-going problems' worry rescue pilot

THE PILOT in charge of the Coastguard helicopter during the *Pionersk* rescue operation fears that lives of klondyker crews may soon be lost.

Captain Paul Bentley, chief pilot at Bristow Helicopters Summerville base, said that over the last 12 months there had been "300-odd very lucky seamen".

That has undoubtedly been down to the heroic and skilful helicopter and lifeboat crews who risked their lives in atrocious conditions on Monday morning and during last November's rescues from the *Lunohods* and *Borodinskoy Poly*.

The *Lunohods* rescue operation last year proved very difficult, with heavy swells and high winds making it near on impossible to get near the vessel which was lodged on rocks at the bottom of 100 foot cliffs.

"By the look of things this is going to be an ongoing problem, and one ship sooner or later is going to end up under the cliffs at

Bressay or Noss where we won't be able to get near her," said Capt Bentley. "That is what worries me the most."

Talking about Monday morning's drama, Capt Bentley said he was alerted at 1am by the Lerwick Coastguard station. "We were airborne within 25 minutes of the call, which is quite quick for a night-time callout."

Ten minutes later the helicopter was on scene, and there were crew already waiting on the deck of the *Pionersk*. The klondyker's captain arranged for the women to be winched off first.

Over the next three hours, the helicopter made nine trips between the vessel and the Clickimin landing site, airlifting a total of 88 crew to safety. The reason for so many trips having to be made was the weather — surprisingly very calm weather.

Capt Bentley said the gales which caused the *Pionersk* so many problems had died down as the winching operations were

taking place, and meant heavy helicopter loads were an impossibility.

The lifeboat rescued the other 67 crew, and Capt Bentley was full of praise for the *Soldian*'s crew, who had to manoeuvre in rough seas caused by residual waves of around 10 metres.

The rescue operation encountered several difficulties for the helicopter crew, but "it really went quite well, and was well organised".

Darkness is always a problem, and operating without horizon meant more on the instruments side had to be used. There was also a great deal of sea haze, making visibility poor at low levels.

Capt Bentley also praised his crew, winch operator Dave Ellis, winchman Paul Mansell, and co-pilot John Rowlings who, because of the ship's position and conditions, had to take control of the helicopter on occasions on the left hand side while winching was carried out on the right.

Adding to the list of troubled klondykers

THE *Pionersk* is the fourth klondyker in the last year to require urgent assistance from emergency services in Shetland.

Two daring rescues took place in terrible conditions last November, with 60 crew being saved from the Latvian vessel *Lunohods* which grounded under the Bressay lighthouse on the 9th. Another 73 were rescued from the Kaliningrad-registered *Borodinskoye Polye* eight days later after she ran aground on Unicorn Rock at the north end of the harbour.

On 25th August this year, 30 non-essential crew were plucked to safety by the Lerwick Lifeboat *Soldian* from the Lithuanian klondyker *Seda* after a fire broke out in her engine room. She was anchored at the north end of Bressay.

There was another emergency on the 9th October when the Russian reefer *Smolnyy* ran aground on the Niva Baa, between the Soldian Rock and the treacherous Unicorn. Perfect weather may have prevented another wreck as she was able to refloat herself 12 hours later. She was this week still in the Malakoff dry dock having repairs carried out on her hull.

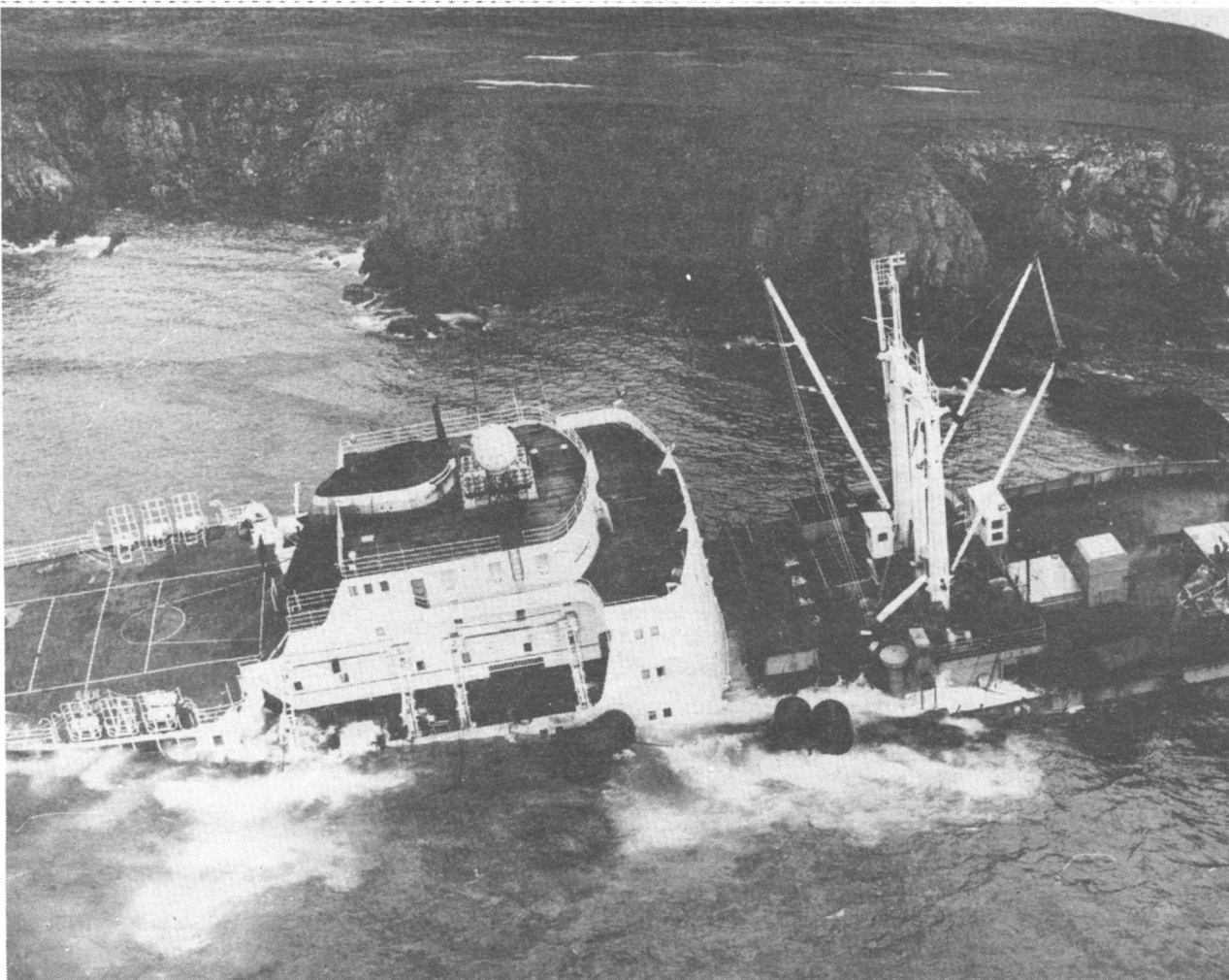
While these have been the

more serious incidents in recent months, factory ships in Shetland have been hitting the news headlines for some years, ever since the Nigerian klondyker *Azu* ran aground at Breiwick in November 1989, and was then arrested for non-payment of debts. She remained in Lerwick for two years before being allowed to leave.

In August 1992 the Russian factory ship *Tralmeyster Mogutov* drifted onto rocks at Breiwick after an anchor its moorings in high winds. She was towed off, but had been holed and large quantities of diesel were spilled.

There was also the Lithuanian *S. Darius* which lost engine power off the south-west of Shetland last January during the storms which wrecked the *Braer*. She was towed to Lerwick, where she was arrested and her crew remained stranded without fuel and food for almost a year until the bills were eventually paid.

At the end of last July the Kaliningrad-registered *Chernomorkaya Slava* went on fire, and 100 crew had to be transferred to another klondyker. It proved to be Shetland's biggest ever fire-fighting operation.



Hard aground in the early hours of Monday morning.

Photo: Malcolm Younger

Winds hamper recovery operation

WINDS and sea swell yesterday hampered the recovery of the remaining oil on board the grounded klondyker *Pionersk*, and the forecast for today and tomorrow does not bode well for the oil recovery team.

When the operation was suspended on Wednesday at 4.45pm, due to deteriorating weather, about 200 tonnes had been recovered by the vessel *Forth Explorer*.

Within 12 hours of running aground the *Pionersk* had broken her back on the rocks and had

begun breaking up. There were 460 tons of heavy fuel and 110 tons of diesel aboard.

Some fuel had escaped at this point but had not reached the shore, and Lerwick Harbour Trust was considering spraying dispersants on the oil which had so far leaked out. Also on Monday morning the ship's refrigeration system became damaged and had released ammonia into the air.

Police asked people to leave the shore area, while Shetland Health Board and officers from the SIC's environmental services

department began monitoring the air. The health board's director of public health Dr Derek Cox said the areas where diesel oil vapour and ammonia vapour could be detected were small and patchy.

Monitoring the air using a vapour analyser showed that at worst the level of organic vapour was less than two parts per million, which was well within safety limits. Dr Cox added that there had been no reports of residents in the area complaining of any symptoms or discomfort.

During Monday afternoon the Coastguard Agency's Marine Pollution Control Unit arrived and flew over the *Pionersk* with salvage and oil recovery advisers. The vessel was not refloatable.

A remote sensing aircraft, with infra-red equipment, reported about two tonnes of light fuel in the water and around 50-60 tonnes

of heavy bunker fuel in pockets near the vessel.

Lerwick Harbour Trust had commissioned Aberdeen-based pollution control experts Briggs Marine Environmental Services, who sent experts with equipment up on Monday and their recovery vessel *Forth Explorer* on Tuesday.

LHT also mobilised local contractors Burgess and Garrick to clean up debris washed ashore from the *Pionersk*, and any oil that washed ashore. None had by Monday night.

On Tuesday morning things were looking brighter, with north-westerly winds blowing the spill oil southwards to open sea. The slick was three kilometres long and 500 metres wide, and no pollution had yet come ashore.

Scottish Office approval was granted for localised spraying of the slick with dispersants, and this was carried out on Tuesday afternoon. The spraying operation was controlled by a pollution surveillance aircraft.

Small quantities of fuel were still leaking from the vessel, but none had yet come ashore. Some birds at this point were showing contamination.

The MPCU's team board the *Pionersk* and found 350 tonnes of recoverable oil and a further 200 tonnes which could possibly be recovered. A diving survey had revealed the vessel had settled on the rocks, allowing for a recovery operation if weather permitted. It was hoped recovery would begin on Wednesday morning.

On Wednesday the slick had spread, with light sheens being reported from Noss to Mousa. It was thought this oil would disperse naturally.

Work on the vessel went on throughout Wednesday, with assistance being given by the *Pionersk* captain and senior crew. The *Forth Explorer* had recovered 200 tonnes, while Malakoff divers managed to plug oil tank vent pipes which posed the risk of leaking.

Meanwhile, an MPCU chemical strike team which had arrived in Shetland had been working on board the klondyker with breathing apparatus to tackle the ammonia which had been given cause for concern. The closed some 60 to 70 valves, and the leaks, they believe, stopped. However, monitoring of the air would continue for several days, according to Dr Cox, and he asked the public to stay away from the area until the whole operation was complete.

By Wednesday afternoon some oil had gone ashore on the Sands of Sound, and Burgess and Garrick went there to begin the clean-up operation.

Around 400 birds had now been sighted as being affected by oil, but no fatalities had been reported. The effects on wildlife were being closely monitored by various environmentalist groups.

In addition to having Briggs Marine, Lerwick Harbour Trust chartered a team from Dutch pollution experts Smit Tak to help the operation.

However, the weather yesterday morning prevented any recovery of oil, and Lerwick Harbour Trust general manager Allan Wishart said the oil had spread towards the north in Breiwick, but none had appeared to have gone ashore, apart from on the Sands of Sound. There was also a heavy accumulation of heavy rainbow sheen around the headland into Gulberwick's north-east shoreline.

The *Pionersk* itself was surrounded by a ring of heavy sheen, and the smell of diesel in the surrounding areas was strong.

Was *Pionersk* too close?

BLAME for the *Pionersk* grounding has been put, by some, on her being too close to the Ness of Tribister in the first place.

Nearby Gulberwick residents and other harbour observers have commented on how close the factory ship appeared to be to the shore at the weekend, with claims that she had almost grazed the rocks some hours before actually doing so.

However, Lerwick Harbour Trust general manager Allan Wishart, who has seen radar picture, did not accept this.

Mr Wishart said that it had been mentioned to him how, before the grounding, the *Pionersk* had seemed close to the cliffs from the Gulberwick side, but when that person went across to Bressay the vessel seemed perfectly safe. "It is amazing how distances are distorted at different angles."

He added: "If we were aware of a boat being in what we thought was a dangerous position we would advise the

The weather yesterday was south-easterly force six/seven, changing to south-westerly force four. Today the forecast was again south-westerly force four, changing to north-westerly force five. For the weekend the wind was expected to go back to south-easterly force three to five.

"The weather is not good," said Mr Wishart, "but we have such a professional team here I hope something might happen to recover the oil."

The cost of the operation following the grounding of the *Pionersk*, which was uninsured, "is already major", said Mr Wishart, who operates a polluter pays principle. Pollution control teams have been commissioned by LHT from Aberdeen and Holland, while local firms have also been involved. "The money being spent is being spent sensibly, but it is an expensive operation."

Once the operation is over Mr Wishart will be contacting the *Pionersk* owners Reftranslot Joint Stock Company in an attempt to recover costs.

boat of that." Ultimately, however, the master of the ship makes the final decision.

He added that if anyone had been very concerned about the ship's position they should have contacted Shetland Coastguard or the harbour trust's port control office.

Mr Wishart, who had spoken to the *Pionersk* captain after the grounding, said the storm appeared to catch him by surprise. Instead of the force four or five he had expected, he was caught in the teeth of a force nine gale, gusting to force 10. As he attempted to manoeuvre out of the area he encountered difficulties with his anchor, with it ultimately breaking, and then ended up on the rocks.

Mr Wishart said the captain knew where he was lying, and had instruments available to him for gauging whether or not it was safe where he was. "Whatever judgment he comes to it is on his own head."



A crewman waits for a place aboard another klondyker in the fleet at the small boat harbour in Lerwick on Monday afternoon.

Photo: Malcolm Younger

Bad klondykers to be banned?

THE THIRD major accident involving a klondyker at Lerwick within a year appears to have concentrated Government minds at last.

Shipping minister Lord Goschen and Scottish fisheries minister Sir Hector Monro announced yesterday afternoon that they were taking a two-stage approach to tackle the risks from sub-standard foreign factory ships.

From the beginning of next year's herring season, applications for licences will have to be made 28 days in advance; the number of licences issued will be limited to the amount of fish available; and klondykers without a licence will be told to leave British waters.

The second stage will be a consultation paper on measures to achieve compliance with internationally agreed safety standards.

The Scottish Office said yesterday that Sir Hector and Lord Goschen had been discussing the position at a meeting on Monday arranged in advance of the grounding of the *Pionersk*.

But Mr Wallace also met Sir Hector Monro on Monday at a pre-arranged meeting, and said afterwards: "I left the meeting without any real assurance that the Government has a policy for dealing with klondyker safety for the current season."

He described the slow rate of progress as "alarming", adding: "It is difficult to express the frustration and serious concern that Shetland is having to deal with yet another vessel going aground."

"It seems that as far as this winter is concerned, the Government's armoury is remarkably bare when it comes to measures to promote safety."

Yesterday's announcement is unlikely to take much heat out of Lord Goschen's visit to Shetland today.

'While the ships are not fundamentally unsafe, many of them are in a far from satisfactory condition, and their very density in a small area must give rise to increased risk of collision or other casualty in bad weather. There is also an increased risk to lifeboatmen and rescue helicopter crews.' — Lord Donaldson's report [May].

Urgent action must be taken to minimise the threat of another factory ship running aground, as the next one could possibly lead to deaths and widespread pollution, Shetland Islands Council convener Lewis Smith said this week.

"This is the first period of bad weather this winter and it lasted only for a few hours, and yet already one of the large fleet of klondykers moored around Lerwick Harbour has gone aground."

"Shetlanders are feeling that this has got to stop," he said, adding that he was relieved there had been no loss of life on this occasion. "We have got to do everything we can to protect the klondyker crews, and also protect the people belonging to our emergency services."

During Lord Goschen's six-hour visit "I will be making sure that he fully understands the council's concern", and Convener Smith hopes the minister will leave in no doubt about the mounting concerns locally.

All concerned parties want the improvements recommended by Lord Donaldson in his report *Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas* to be implemented immediately.

Lord Donaldson also said in his report he wanted measures to be implemented this winter.

Lerwick Harbour Trust general manager Allan Wishart said he was deeply concerned about the future. "We have been lucky three times with no loss of life. Can we really expect another incident where there is no loss of life?"

Mr Wishart was not only worried for the klondyker crews, but the crews of the lifeboat, helicopter and harbour trust vessels. "They are all in the thick of it and at risk as well." His other concern is the threat to the environment.

Mr Wishart said the harbour trust had done a lot in the past couple of years to minimise the risk. The body now issues information packs, which includes all



The Forth Explorer takes oil from the Pionersk.

Photo: Graeme Storey

relevant information about the port. They have their own emergency plan, their own boats to monitor the klondykers, and so on.

Backing this up are the inspections carried out by the Department of Transport's Marine Safety Agency. "They have had an excellent programme of inspections but when they find defects, unless the ship is tied up, they are powerless to do anything."

Mr Wishart said this provided the ironic, but ludicrous, situation of having one Government agency, the MSA, inspecting ships and finding defects and having another Government department, the Scottish Office Agricultural and Fisheries Department, issuing licences left, right and centre to klondykers allowing them to continue trans-shipping.

He added: "Even if we had all this in place it may not prevent accident, but it would be a general drive towards improving standards. We must drive the defective and worst vessels out of the system."

The question of insurance was one that had to be dealt with on the international table, but Mr Wishart hoped it too would be linked at some time with safety inspections.

Mr Wishart understands the Government cannot be too hasty

about implementing regulations, for the fear of any backlash on the fishing industry. "I understand that this is the only major outlet for herring and mackerel and if it were not for the presence of klondykers there would be a good risk of collapse of the pelagic industry."

He believes the number of klondykers in Lerwick Harbour (85 on Wednesday night) is a factor that should be taken into account. "I am not convinced all the vessels are required for the amount of fish that is available."

Mr Wishart believes that "un-

less we get better ships and more shore-based processing we run the risk of another accident happening again".

Secretary of the Shetland Fishermen's Association John Goodlad agreed there had to be a greater degree of control on the klondyker fleet. However, he urged against "a knee-jerk reaction" to the grounding of the *Pionersk*. "Something needs to be done and needs to be done quickly, but we don't want something hasty introduced that would destroy the pelagic industry."

The value of the UK pelagic

catch is around £42 million a year and is of vital importance to the fishing industry. The fish factory fleet buys some 40 per cent of UK mackerel and some 75 per cent of UK herring, including fish which may not be easily saleable on the domestic market. There is no readily available alternative market for them.

Mr Goodlad said: "What we need to do is find a sensible solution to assure the klondyking continues but continues with a greater guarantee of security and safety than we have had in the past."



Bulgarians await news of money

WHILE attention has this week focused on the *Pionersk*, the crews of the arrested Bulgarian klondykers *Aktinia* and *Rotalia* berthed at the OIL base are awaiting news about their legal claim for unpaid wages.

The International Transport Federation (ITF), which represents the interests of transport workers worldwide, was last week given power of attorney by the crews to settle their wage claim. The crews on each ship are owed approximately £150,000.

The ships were placed under arrest on behalf of the crews last Thursday, and solicitors Dowle, Smith and Rutherford, appointed by the ITF to act on behalf of the crew at a local level, said this week that there had been no change to that situation.

Solicitor Chris Dowle said the owners Oceanskiy Nibilov had the chance of paying the sum owed, but if they did not do so the ships would be auctioned, with the money going to the crews first before any other parties owed money by the shipping company.

Mr Dowle added that ITF inspector Bryan Allen, who was in Shetland last week to offer legal assistance, was now in Ullapool to begin the same process for three more Bulgarian ships that are berthed there.



A view from above: deck cargo on the wrecked ship.

Photo: Graeme Storey

Tug tows in klondyker

A LITHUANIAN klondyker was this week tied up at Dales Voe awaiting repairs after breaking down over the weekend.

The *S. Darius*'s troubles began early on Friday morning as she made her way up the east side of Shetland heading back to Lithuania from Ullapool.

At around 1 am the ship, with 151 crew on board, made contact with coastguards to let them know that she was experiencing engine problems 25 miles north-west of Orkney. The Coastguard was told she did not need assistance and was heading back to Ullapool, making only three knots in winds which were gusting up to 50 knots.

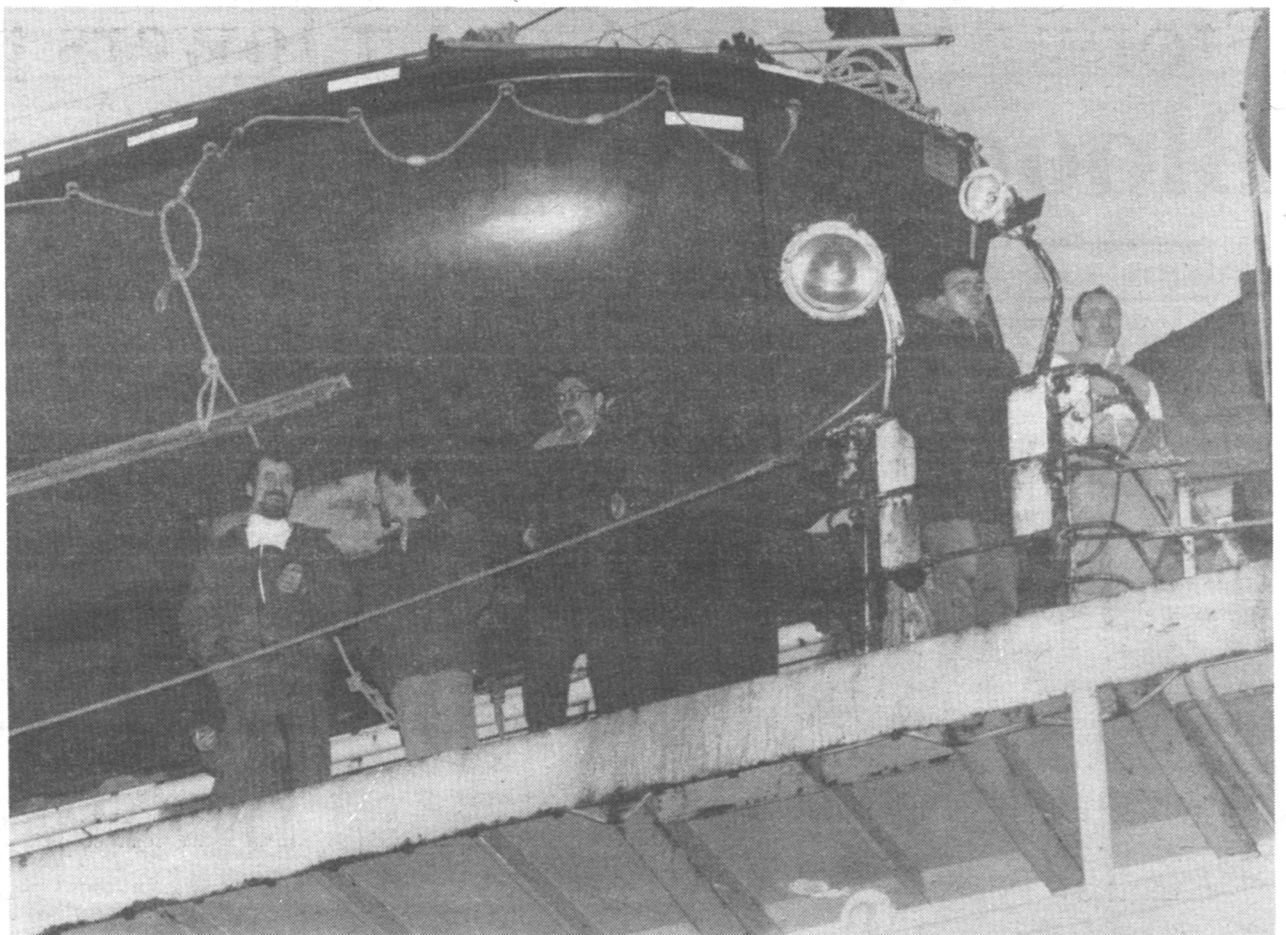
However, early on Sunday the *S. Darius* was drifting north of Orkney and in trouble. The tug *Smit Lloyd 121* was in the area and able to provide assistance, taking the 12,000 tonne klondyker under tow just before 9 am and heading for Ullapool.

Just after 12.20 pm, however, the tow line between the two

vessels snapped and buckled around the *Smit Lloyd 121*'s port propeller, reducing her to the use of just one engine and bow thruster. At this point the vessels were 40 miles south-west of Foula. After waiting for the weather to ease the *Smit Lloyd 121* succeeded in getting another towline across to the *S. Darius* and both vessels started heading for Lerwick.

While this was happening the stand-by vessel *Arctic Namabush* had set out from Lerwick to lend assistance. At around 7.30 pm on Sunday, as she was about three miles from Sumburgh Head, she was hit by a large wave which damaged the vessel's bridge and washed one of her lifeboats away. The *Arctic Namabush*, which had nine people on board, returned to Lerwick on one engine, arriving back around 10 pm.

Meanwhile the *Smit Lloyd 121* and *S. Darius* made their way back to Lerwick, arriving safely just after lunch.



Crewmen watch as the Lithuanian klondyker *S. Darius* is moored safely at Dales Voe.

Photo: Graeme Storey

Isles near top of landings

A TOTAL of 106,000 tonnes of fish was landed in Shetland in 1991, making it second only to Peterhead for weight of landings, according to figures released on Wednesday by the Government's statistical advice service.

The statistics are also bound to result in further calls for the main UK fisheries minister to be Scottish based as they show that the 432,000 tonnes of fish landed by UK boats in Scotland amounts to 70 per cent of the total.

Peterhead saw 119,000 tonnes of landings, with Shetland next in the table, followed by Ullapool with 62,000 tonnes. Peterhead was also top on first sale value of landings at £81 million and Aberdeen second with £26 million, squeezing Shetland into third place with £23 million. The reason for the big gap in price terms between Shetland and Peterhead is accounted for by the fact that herring and mackerel, which are relatively low-priced species, made up most of the landings in the isles.

First sale value of landings by UK boats into Scottish ports was £267 million. Haddock remained the single most important species of these in terms of value, with landings of £50 million representing almost a fifth of the 1991 total.

Harbour record

THE last month of 1992 was a good one for Lerwick Harbour according to harbourmaster Captain David Polson, and the year as a whole saw the port dealing with a record gross tonnage of shipping.

"It went over the six million gross tonnes," he told the monthly meeting of Lerwick Harbour Trust on Tuesday. "That's the first time it has been over the six million mark — and that's without counting the local fishing fleet."

In fact the exact figure was 6,100,879 grt — 754,553 above the 1991 total. During the year 4930 ships and boats visited the port with British fishing vessels being the most numerous category at 2059. There were also 920 other vessels, 812 oil research vessels, 796 general ships, 221 foreign fishing boats, 112 oil tankers and 12 HM ships.

In December 363 ships and boats called, 42 more than the same month in 1991. The gross-registered tonnage of vessels visiting the port was above half a million at 505,840 — some 126,806 above the figure for the same period the previous year.

Ferries officer defends Bressay's new boat

CONCERN in Bressay over the suitability of the new ferry *Leirna* has arisen as a result of regular cancellations in the recent spell of bad weather.

Angry islanders are said to have been telephoning the Shetland Islands Council marine operations department, the Lerwick harbour office and Bressay councillor Jim Irvine complaining at the loss of the service and demanding action.

At Tuesday's meeting of the Bressay Community Council when in reasoned discussion, ferries officer Mike Bowman was invited to explain the situation and suggest remedies.

He told people at the meeting that claims that the *Leirna* was in any way a sub-standard boat or not up to the job were incorrect. She had been built to council specifications and fulfilled them. "She is more powerful, will carry a bigger cargo, and do more things than *Grima* [the old ferry]," he said. "The problem is windage. It is a big flat-sided boat which catches the wind. Its design specification was for it to work up to force nine, which it does. You get what you pay for."

He admitted that the *Grima*, being smaller, "could possibly get in one more trip" before the service was closed down as the weather got worse, but the advantages of the *Leirna* outweighed the disadvantage and it did not make sense to keep the old boat on standby for such occasions.

Senior skipper on the Bressay ferry Billy Clark agreed, saying: "Anybody who wants the *Grima* back must have a very short memory." This got nods and general murmurs of agreement from everyone at the meeting.

He had noticed through his own experience that winds of force nine seemed to be the highest speed the new ferry could operate in so it was performing what the SIC had asked of it, but he added that an extra 400 horsepower in the engines could improve the performance.

Captain Bowman said this was unlikely to help, and said plans already existed to extend the Bressay pier by between six and 10 feet to lengthen the jetty face. This would make docking there easier in borderline winds. Mr Clark agreed that it would.

Councillor Irvine said this had been a prime example of "the council putting the cart before the horse", getting the boat before adequate docking facilities were available. Capt. Bowman said the hold-up was in negotiating the extension with the owners of the seabed, the Crown Estate Commissioners.

Capt. Bowman told the meeting that in all ferry operations safety was of paramount importance. "The prime rule for running the ferry is the master has the ultimate decision," he said. "If he decides conditions are unsuitable he will cease the run. If you change that ruling we wouldn't have a leg to stand on in the event of an accident. Equally, if the master decides to restart the running he can do so."

With regards to running the Lerwick pilot boat *Knab*, Capt. Bowman said it had been done during the festive season and occasionally in marginal weather but it was at considerable cost to the council. It could not be looked on as a foul weather ferry nor as a right of islanders. It was not equipped as a ferry and the safe landing of passengers was a complicated business.

He added that if people got cut off then it was just unlucky. It was not worth risking a life, an injury or a boat. Mr Irvine agreed saying: "You are living on an island in an archipelago and you have to accept there are going to be problems from time to time with transport."

Those at the community council meeting said they understood that nothing could be done about the weather and accepted explanations of the boat's capabilities.

However, they felt strongly that when ferries did not run, there were problems getting information on how long they were likely to be out of action and what arrangements were being made.

Chairman of the community council Laurence Anderson summed up the feeling of the meeting when he said: "When the ferry did go off there was nobody there to tell us what was happening and what was planned. I appreciate that no boat can run in bad conditions but I think the situation should be updated each hour."

Mr Irvine agreed, saying that the calls directed to him had all been courteous and from people wanting to know what was going on.

Capt. Bowman said the problem had been that because the master has control over his own operation, at times his department was not sure what was going on. There were also conflicting weather forecasts and reports of conditions that added to the confusion.

"This extreme spell of bad weather has brought this to a head," he said. Mr Clark agreed. "If you had just one severe gale you wouldn't have noticed it."

Mr Irvine and Capt. Bowman had discussed the information problem before the meeting and decided that the best answer was to publish the telephone number of the ferry's bridge and keep it manned when it is laid up because of foul weather. People wanting an up-to-date resume of the situation could call 0836 243,204 at any time when the ferry would normally be running, but he stressed it was not to be used for normal inquiries and timetable queries.

Another option of putting a long recorded message on a telephone answering machine at the Bressay hut was discounted as it would need regular updating.

All who spoke at the meeting

were annoyed at reports of abusive telephone calls. Community councillor Hazel Anderson said it was unfair in such a situation that people should get abused on the telephone, especially those at the harbour office who had nothing to do with the situation.

Mr Irvine said he hoped publishing the telephone number would not result in the skipper and crew being harassed when the ferry was laid up in bad weather and his advice was to just "pull the plug on the conversation" if it did.

The council was satisfied with the suggestion and Capt. Bowman was asked to proceed with publishing the number.

The *Leirna* and a possible SIC system for keeping the travelling public informed about ferry services were also mentioned at the monthly meeting of Lerwick Harbour Trust when trustees considered a letter from Bressay Community Council thanking them for the ferry service provided by the *Knab* during the festive season.

Harbourmaster Captain David Polson said some people had been getting "irate" with port control about SIC ferry problems. "It's nothing to do with us," he pointed out. "But Sunday it wasn't a day to let go any ropes or moorings, whether it be in Bressay, Yell Sound or Whalsay. Some people were criticising the new ferry, but no ferry would have made it in at that pier that day."

Jim Irvine told the meeting: "There are a lot of pierhead skippers around just now. I don't think the new ferry has got a chance."

The weather had been "atrocious" and the crew were "still finding their feet" with the *Leirna*. "All the ferry services have been disrupted but I think the SIC have to accept responsibility for not having a proper communication system with the travelling public," he added.

Figures detail price slip

THE first sale value of fish landed into Scotland by UK vessels during the period January to November 1992 was £233.1 million, five per cent less than in the same period of 1991.

Despite a six per cent increase in the weight of fish landed average prices were 11 per cent down on the same period of the previous year. Haddock prices were down 28 per cent and those for saithe fell by 15 per cent, while whiting and cod prices fell by seven and one per cent respectively.

Demersal (white fish) landings were valued at £155.8 million, seven per cent less than in January to November 1991. While the weight of haddock landed rose by seven per cent, average prices fell by 28 per cent resulting in a fall in the total value of haddock landings of 23 per cent to £36.1 million. The weight of whiting landed rose by three per cent and prices fell by seven per cent, resulting in a drop in the value of landings of four per cent to £16.4 million. The value of saithe landings fell by 33 per cent to £4.1 million. There was little change in the weight or value of cod landings at £39.7 million.

Landings of pelagic species such as herring and mackerel were valued at £24.8 million, 12 per cent more than in the same period the previous year.

There was little change in the amount of shellfish landed between January and November 1992 compared with the first 11 months of 1991. The value of landings fell by six per cent to £52.5 million. The amount of Norway lobsters (nephrops) landed fell by one per cent and prices fell by 10 per cent, resulting in a drop in value of 11 per cent to £29.5 million. Scallop landings increased by 38 per cent in weight and 18 per cent in value. Landings of pink shrimps more than doubled in weight and increased by 92 per cent in value. Apart from squid, which was up 28 per cent in price, there was little change in weight and value for the other main shellfish species.

Landings by foreign vessels were valued at £14.5 million, making the total value of all landings into Scotland £247.6 million.

Second oil tanker scare

SHETLAND was involved in a second tanker scare when a Norwegian vessel lost power in Force 11 wind on Sunday night as it waited to enter the Sullom Voe Oil Terminal.

The drama began when the 87,000 tonne *Ambra Dolphin*, which was in ballast at the time, contacted Shetland Coastguard at around 2.40pm to say she was

drifting 10 miles west of Muckle Flugga.

The tanker, which had a crew of 35 onboard, had been among a clutch of vessels waiting in the roads to load up at the terminal, having just arrived from Le Havre.

The Coastguard immediately alerted the Sullom Voe tug *Tirrick* which started to make its way to the scene. In addition the fishing

boat *Altaire* was in the area and standing by while the Greenpeace ship *Solo*, which was berthed in Scalloway, intimated that it too was ready to go to the tanker's assistance if required.

However, by 3.30 pm the *Ambra Dolphin* had succeeded in restarting her engines. The *Tirrick* was recalled and the tanker made her way towards the oil terminal.

Depute director of marine operations Keith Radley said that the *Ambra Dolphin*, a regular caller at the terminal, was one of seven waiting to enter the port, where berthing had been stopped because of the high winds.

Capt. Radley said a full investigation would be carried out into the incident and a report prepared once the ship finally arrived at the terminal.

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