

Inquest Into the death of

Santiago Moreira Fona

Summary of Facts

Santiago Moreira Fona was born in Vigo, Spain on 4th March 1963. In July 2014 he was employed as Second Boatswain on board the fishing vessel 'Venturer' (FK0511).

Mr Moreira held a medical certificate showing his fitness to serve at sea (issued, 23rd May 2014 and valid until 22nd May 2015) which has been provided to the Coroner's Officer.

We have admitted various statements into evidence in accordance with the Coroners Rules and the Interested persons do not object to us relying upon these statements.

These statements are in Spanish taken down by Mr Carcamo in the presence of coroner's officers and we also refer to the translations which have provided for us by Mr Barrientos. This court has recognised him as an expert witness and he has confirmed the accuracy of his translations.

The Captain's Statement confirms that at 17:30 Falkland Island Time on 28th July 2014 the Vessel was situated at Latitude 50°-35'(minutes) 35" (seconds) South 057°- 24' West. There were north-westerly winds of approximately 30 knots. The captain confirms Mr Moreira was in 'perfect health with no health issues whatsoever. He was wearing the necessary protective clothing including warm boots, waterproofs a hard hat and a self-inflating life jacket.

Expecting further bad weather the crew were called to retrieve the fishing gear and the catch.

Mr Moreira and a colleague, Jose Carlos Nove Souto, were standing by the port side trawl door (which is at the rear of the vessel). A necessary cable was not hooked on the door, a temporary chain had been used to secure the door. As they were seeking to winch it on board to connect a cable - all eye witnesses agree – a sudden movement (which may have been a wave) caused the port side trawl door to go up and down suddenly due to its weight. This pushed the two crewman working on that side of the vessel. Mr Nove was washed inboard and Mr Moreira overboard.

The crew took immediate action – man overboard was called and three life rings, two of which had lights, were thrown into the water. The vessel itself could not be manoeuvred because it had its nets and catch out. Zodiac boats were prepared but not launched, which is perhaps unsurprising given the conditions. Other Vessels including FV Petrel were called to join the search. The RAF search and rescue team were alerted and joined the search a little time later.

There is a slight discrepancy as to the timing of the arrival of the Search and Rescue. It is clear from the evidence that the RAF C130 Hercules was already engaged in the search when the RAF Sea King helicopter reached the scene at about 20:30 (8.30pm). As there were two aircraft gaged in the search and given all that was going on I believe the captain could have been easily mistaken, and was about this fact. In relation to this I prefer and rely upon the evidence of Sgt Allanson, the winch man on board the RAF Sea King. Mr

Moreira had at this point been in the sea for 3 hours.

By this time 8 vessels, an RAF Hercules C130 aeroplane and the RAF Sea king helicopter were involved in the search. The captain confirms that over the period of the search, the wind increased to 40 knots, visibility deteriorated and the sea state was 'very rough'. This is confirmed by the winch man of the search and rescue helicopter who describes the weather as '...terrible. It was raining... 30-40ft waves.

The RAF Sea King helicopter found him at about 21:50 (9.50pm local time) after he had been in the water for nearly 4 ½ hours. When winched on board Mr Moereira had no pulse and was not breathing. The trained Search And Rescue crew did resuscitation and tried to use a defibrillator but were unable to do so the heart scan showed it was 'un-shockable'.

The Search And Rescue team alerted King Edward VII Memorial Hospital staff and an emergency team was assembled. They met the helicopter on landing and continued resuscitation attempts. After a further 25 minutes the decision was made to cease life support activities.

The Vessel immediately returned to Stanley and medical care was sought due Mr Nove's injuries.

The ship's captain formally identified the body just after 2pm on 29th July 2014 to my Coroner's Officer, PC Matthew Jenkins

I ordered a post mortem examination, which was undertaken at the King Edward 7th Memorial Hospital by Dr John Clark MB ChB FRCPath DipFM, a Home Office registered forensic pathologist on 8th August, 2014.

Dr Clark's report identifies injuries consistent with resuscitation attempts and noted a diagonal abrasion on the outer aspect of the upper third of the left thigh (consistent with impact by or against some heavy object on board the vessel) and a small healing abrasion on the upper third of the left shin.

A sample of blood was taken for alcohol which returned a result of 0.8mg – which I am advised is effectively a nil result.

Dr Clark concludes that Mr Moreira died primarily from drowning, there being typical changes of this in his airways and lungs – the airways containing a frothy fluid and the lungs being bulky and distended. Dr Clark goes on to say "it is ...likely that he succumbed quickly to the drowning and died soon after entering the water"

The cause of death is recorded as:-

Primary Cause

Drowning and cold immersion

Due to

Accident at Sea

Mr Moreira death resulted from him being pushed by the trawl door over board as a result of the prevailing weather and sea conditions. The weather and sea conditions were terrible and were worsening.

Despite the best efforts of the captain and crew of the Venturer and the captains and crews of 8 other vessels it was not possible to locate or recover Mr. Moreira. The specialist RAF Search and Rescue team deployed considerable skills and experience to locate him.

I will record a verdict of accidental death.

This is a tragic accident and his colleges and other vessels in the area are to be thanked for their efforts to save him. It is quite clear that the Search and Rescue team and the eight vessels searched for some time in treacherous conditions.

Mr Moreira's body was only found due to the skill of the search and rescue team and I will write to the Commander British forces to commend them for their skill and bravery.

This incident shows the great danger that fisherman in these waters can face and is a testament to their courage.

My sympathy and condolences are extended to Mr Moreira's wife and other relatives and to his colleagues.

I would like to thank the Spanish Ministry of foreign affairs for their assistance in communicating the family. I would like to record my thanks to the coroner officer, the Military Police at MPC and the interested persons for their assistance with this matter.

This Inquest is now formally closed and the death will be registered with the Registrar General of the Falkland Islands.

C P Judge
HM Coroner
Falkland Islands