

Department for
Transport
News Release

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FINAL SURVEY OF THE GAUL GOES AHEAD (DFT-007)

A £2 million government-funded expedition led by the Marine Accident Investigation Branch to survey the underwater wreck of the trawler *Gaul* will set sail soon from Aberdeen. The survey vessel *Seisranger*, operated by Subsea 7, is expected to be at sea for about four weeks.

The *Gaul* sank off the North Cape in the Barents Sea in 1974 with the loss of all 36 crew. There was no distress call.

The survey is being carried out on behalf of the Attorney General as part of the re-opened Formal Investigation - under the Wreck Commissioner, Mr Justice Steel - to establish the cause of the vessel's loss and close down speculation about its fate.

Shipping Minister David Jamieson said:

This expedition marks a crucial stage in the investigation into the loss of the *Gaul*. The latest in marine technology and skilled expertise will allow a full and precise examination of the interior of the wreck that will lead to a proper explanation of the tragedy.

I sincerely hope that this second and final survey will bring back evidence to bring to a close the *Gaul* families' patient wait to discover the fate of their loved ones, and put to rest once and for all speculation about the *Gaul*.

Representatives of the families will be on board the vessel throughout the expedition and those onshore will be kept up to date via daily website updates at www.fv-gaul.org.uk and via their legal representatives.

Using the latest marine technology, the *Seisranger* will:

- supplement the photographic evidence explaining the loss of the *Gaul*;
- search for any remains of the crew of the *Gaul* and recover samples for return to a forensic laboratory in order to try to establish their identity using DNA profiling;
- collect evidence, if any, connected with allegations that the *Gaul* was engaged in espionage activities and to examine an unidentified cable on the seabed; and
- develop a means for entering and examining the interior the wreck.

Investigators from the MAIB will be able to apply many of the techniques and skills used in the survey in future marine investigations.

The expedition leader, Mr Keith Dixon, is a Principal Inspector at the MAIB. He will be supported by colleagues from the MAIB, two fishing advisors, two technical experts and one other nominated by the *Gaul* families, and two forensic specialists comprising the Coroner's Team. The Department will be represented by an expert in offshore project management and in recording underwater video images.

Notes to editors

1. The Hull-registered motor trawler *Gaul* was lost off the North Cape on 8 February 1974. There was no distress message and all 36 crew members perished. The only wreckage recovered was a lifebuoy and the exact location of the wreck was not discovered.
2. A Formal Investigation was held during September and October 1974 into the loss of the vessel. It concluded that the vessel capsized and foundered in heavy seas. However, the investigation found no direct evidence of how the tragedy occurred.
3. In August 1997, an expedition funded by UK and Norwegian television companies discovered the wreck of *Gaul*. The documentary film of the expedition was shown on Channel 4 on 6 November 1997. Following this discovery, and on the recommendation of the Marine Accident Investigation Branch that a more detailed examination of the wreck would be necessary to determine the cause of the sinking of the vessel, the Deputy Prime Minister announced in January 1998 that the Government would undertake a survey of the wreck. The survey was undertaken by the MAIB and completed in August 1998. On the 15th August 1998, the Deputy Prime Minister, on the advice of the Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents that new and important evidence had been found, announced his intention to reopen the Formal Investigation into the sinking of the *Gaul*.
4. The main objectives of the underwater survey has been agreed between the parties to the Formal Investigation and by the Department. This second and final survey will comprehensively supplement the evidence gained from the first survey. The Wreck Commissioner, Mr Justice Steel, was appointed by the Lord Chancellor in May 2000. The families have been told in meetings with the Department that there can be no guarantee of success and that there is no prospect of making further visits to the wreck site.
5. The contract to conduct the underwater survey was awarded to Halliburton's Energy Services Group (ESG), now Subsea 7. The value of the contract awarded is in the region of ?2 million.

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