



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Office of Marine Safety

Date: February 28, 2003

Place: Telephone Interview

Person Interviewed: Robert McKerral

Interview Conducted By: Robert Ford
Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Robert McKerral was interviewed in conjunction with the investigation into the sinking of the Small Passenger Vessel *Panther* (DCA03MM018). It has been developed from my handwritten notes of the conversation and is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge and recollection.

INTERVIEW

Mr. McKerral was a resident of Scotland and was traveling with his wife. He was 49 years of age and his wife was 47. About one-half into the trip, the vessel encountered dolphins and the master made rounds turns in an attempt to bring the dolphins to the surface and jump the vessel's wake. The stern area of the vessel began taking water and as the stern sank deeper into the water, seawater began coming over the stern transom.

According to Mr. McKerral, the master did not seem to appreciate the problem. The master moved people aft to view the dolphins. He moved people back to their seats when he observed that the stern of the vessel was very deep in the water. He stopped and stated that he wanted to give the bilge pumps an opportunity to level the boat. He never advised passengers to don lifejackets and as a fishing boat approached he yelled to the passengers that the vessel was sinking. Most of the passengers lunged to the port side on the side that the fishing boat was

approaching. The heel to port caused the decks to go underwater and the vessel sank quickly.

Mr. McKerral and wife held on to the rails of the sunken vessel and remained with another couple that could not swim. He stated that the other two were Canadian citizens. The captain was also holding on to the rails. Mr. McKerral's wife made a first attempt to retrieve a lifejacket by diving beneath the water. Her first attempt was unsuccessful. She made a second attempt and returned with one lifejacket that was given to one of the non-swimmers.

A pleasure boat arrived on scene and rescued him, his wife and the master. He was not certain how the other couple was rescued. Mr. McKerral felt that the master did not appreciate the seriousness of the situation until it was too late. He had been revving the engine for speed and cut across his own wake. He recalls the safety brief. He did not hear any alarms. He did recall the master asking passengers to look over the side to see if the bilge pumps were functioning.

END OF INTERVIEW

Robert B. Ford