



Helicopter rescue crew, left to right, John Carrigan, John Ardley, Rob Green and Tony Gear.

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7.55pm on Friday, watch manager Duncan MacKay said.

The vessel's position, 240 miles west-north-west of Lewis, was established via a distress beacon picked up by satellite. Two French trawlers, the Cap Saint Jacques and the Bruix, also headed for the stricken vessel, but were unable to get close enough to take the crew off it.

An RAF Nimrod maritime reconnaissance flight was scrambled from RAF Kinloss and arrived over the boat just before midnight.

The aircraft crew confirmed the vessel's position and that she was drifting downwind. The fishermen had fired off a red flare and were using a lamp to signal SOS.

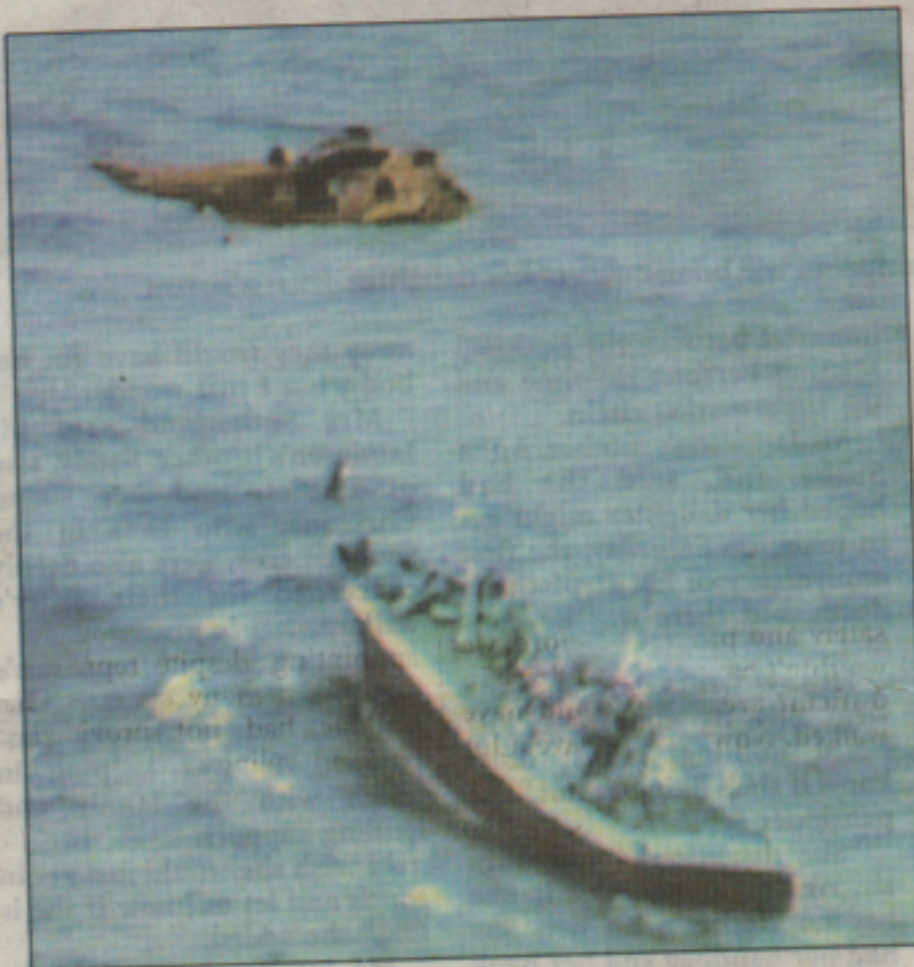
A Lossiemouth-based Sea King helicopter headed for Le Perrain at first light on Saturday, arriving at 9.30am.

Flying Officer Marshall Kinneer of RAF Kinloss said: "Normally you're talking five minutes per winch because it takes so long for the guy to get on to the vessel because of the water level."

However, the rescue team had all 18 men and the winchman airlifted to safety within 24 minutes.

A Nimrod crew remained above the scene and kept a close watch while the operation took place.

It was initially thought that winchman Sergeant John Carrigan, 33, would have to search the crew out, but they were suited up and on deck, ready to be lifted to safety when the Sea King HAR3 arrived, he said. This saved valuable time. At one stage the vessel listed



The helicopter winches the crew of the stricken trawler.

to 60 degrees and the situation became extremely precarious.

The final winch lifted three men - the remaining two crewmen and Sgt Carrigan.

Flt Lt Gear said the crew had made their plans on the assumption that the situation was bad. That was why they waited until first light before carrying it out. It would have been too dangerous to attempt a rescue at night.

A contingency plan was laid so the aircraft could travel to the Faroes if there was insufficient fuel to take them to Stornoway, but it was not put into place.

The helicopter was struggling to reach the island, and the captain considered turning back and heading for the

Faroes, halfway to Stornoway, where it landed at 11.40am.

The crew members were taken to the County Hotel, where they were being cared for by the Fisherman's Mission. One of the survivors from the Le Perrain was last night airlifted from Stornoway to Glasgow after it was discovered he had broken his neck.

Crewman Manuel Vila Sanpedro, 52, from the Spanish Riviera, had initially complained of neck pains after he arrived by RAF helicopter at Stornoway. There was no word on his condition last night.

Crewmate, Carlos Santiago Queiruga, 30, Porto de Son, was having treatment for an eye injury.

The crewmen told last night how they were eating down in the galley as Skipper Jago insisted on battling on to keep the ship safe in the growing storm.

Although the crew were below deck they realised something was wrong because water began gushing through the ship.

Everything not fixed to the bridge was hauled out the shattered holes where the windows had been.

They said after ordering everyone to batten down the hatches, Skipper Jose Gonzalez Perez, 36, from the Riviera, and chief engineer Segundo Vidal, 40, from Porto de Son, defied the raging storm and crawled out on to the wheelhouse to set off the emergency beacon.

It was only when Jose Perez started flashing SOS with a battery torch that the aircraft responded with a flare of its own.

Le Perrain was one of a fleet of French-registered vessels fishing for monkfish in the Rockall area for a three-month trip since January 10.

A Stornoway coastguard spokesman said last night Le Perrain was still drifting out of control and was the responsibility of her owners or anyone who could successfully attempt her salvage.

The fishermen will be flown out to Glasgow from Stornoway by a scheduled British Airways flight this morning to get connections to head back to their home countries.