UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Report of the Investigation

into the
Loss of Life on Board The Commercial Fishing Vessel LA6893ER on Lake Chien, LA, on October 16, 2024

MISLE Activity Number: 8027803

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
United States Coast Guard

Commandant
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16732/IIA # 8027803
22 December 2025

FALL OVERBOARD RESULTING IN THE LOSS OF ONE LIFE FROM THE COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL LA6893ER WHILE OPERATING ON LAKE CHIEN, LOUISIANA ON OCTOBER 16, 2024

ACTION BY THE COMMANDANT

The record and the report of the investigation completed for the subject casualty have been reviewed. The record and the report, including the findings of fact, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations, are approved subject to the following comments. This marine casualty investigation is closed.

ACTION ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Title 46 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 28 Subpart B lacks a mandate for commercial fishermen on all vessels to wear a Personal Floatation Device (PFD). Title 46 CFR § 28.110(b) requires that a PFD be stowed in a readily accessible manner from either the berthing area, work area, or both. It is recommended Commandant amend 46 CFR § 28.110 and add language to make the wearing of a PFD required when working out on deck. The National Institute of Health and Safety (NIOSH) maintains a Commercial Fishing Incident Database (CFID) and has shown that the second most dangerous thing a fisherman faces is a fall overboard. From 2000-2019 there were 266 deaths from falls overboard, none of those victims were wearing a PFD. By mandating the wearing of a type of PFD while operating on the exposed decks of commercial fishing vessels (CFV), any fishermen who falls overboard would significantly increase their likelihood of remaining above water, spotted by search assets, and/or recovered.

> **Action**: I concur with the intent of this recommendation. Mandating all CFV crew members to wear a PFD while working on deck may not be appropriate in all situations. As such, amendments to 46 CFR Part 28 are not currently supported.
>
> The United States Coast Guard (USCG) recommends wearing an activity-appropriate USCG-approved life jacket or buoyant work vest when working over or near the water, where the danger of drowning exists. Similar federal regulations exist under the Occupational Safety and Health Administration jurisdiction in 29 CFR § 1926.106.
>
> The USCG has published voluntary guidance encouraging crews to wear activity-appropriate PFDs while working on the decks of commercial fishing industry vessels. This guidance has been recommended by the National Commercial Fishing Safety

Advisory Committee (NCFSAC). The Commercial Fishing Industry Vessels Safety Best Practices Guide states the following: "It is advised that every person on board the vessel, when on an open deck—particularly at night, when alone, during gear setting or hauling, in adverse weather, while crossing hazardous bars, or when other risks are present—wear an activity-appropriate flotation device with sufficient buoyancy to keep the wearer afloat. This device may be used in addition to, but not as a replacement for, the Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) required by 46 CFR Part 28. The use of a non-USCG-approved PFD is not a violation, provided the required PFDs are also on board."

The Commercial Fishing Industry Vessels Best Safety Practices Guide is discussed with fishing industry operators during Fishing Vessel Safety Dockside Examinations and is available at: https://www.dco.uscg.mil/Portals/9/DCO%20Documents/5p/CG-5PC/CG-CVC/CVC3/NCFSAC/2024/CFIV_Best_Practice_Guide.pdf.

Recommendation 2: Recommend Commandant evaluate the feasibility of implementing the mandatory use of engine cut-off switches (ECOS) for CFVs where the primary helm is not within an enclosed cabin, or at a minimum the mandatory use for single occupant operations. Section 8316 of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2021, which came into effect on April 1, 2021, requires individuals operating covered recreational vessels to use engine cut-off switches to reduce the number of runaway vessels and propeller strikes. Had a similar law been enacted to cover CFVs, such as the one in this casualty, the Master may have been more inclined to use the engine cut-off switch available for his vessel's engine, causing the engine to stop when he likely fell overboard, and potentially allowing for him to return safety to his vessel.

Action: I concur with the intent of this recommendation. The USCG supports encouraging solo fishers to use ECOS on a voluntary basis rather than mandating their use, as some types of ECOS devices may not be appropriate for all commercial operations. Promoting the voluntary adoption of ECOS during Fishing Vessel Safety Dockside Examinations and through recommended best practices are considered practical and effective approaches to enhancing safety for solo operators.

The Report of Investigation analysis determined the fishing vessel LA6893ER, a 21-foot Carolina Skiff, was equipped with a standard ECOS; a safety mechanism designed to immediately stop the engine propulsion when the operator is unexpectedly displaced from the helm. A post incident examination of the vessel confirmed that the ECOS remained installed, the lanyard was attached to the helm, and the switch had not been engaged. It was noted that the ECOS was not normally used by the Master during fishing operations due to its interference with deck mobility. This suggests that certain types of ECOS may not be suitable or practical for all commercial fishing activities, as they can hinder necessary movement on deck.

The USCG Office of Investigations and Casualty Analysis identified that the USCG investigated two single operator fall overboard drownings involving fishing vessels of less than 26 feet between 2015 and 2025. Of the investigations reviewed, there was no mention of a ECOS being used.

An appropriate ECOS may improve safety for solo vessel operators while working in hazardous environments. New technologies offer a variety of ECOS devices available to mariners. It is important for mariners to fully understand the features, capabilities, and manufacturer's technical information for any ECOS they choose to use, and to follow the manufacturer's recommendations to ensure proper operation.

The USCG will incorporate a recommendation for fishers to consider appropriate ECOS devices during solo operations in the 2026 updates to the "Commercial Fishing Industry Vessels Best Safety Practices Guide", which can be accessed at: https://www.dco.uscg.mil/Portals/9/DCO%20Documents/5p/CG-5PC/CG-CVC/CVC3/NCFSAC/2024/CFIV_Best_Practice_Guide.pdf

Administrative Recommendation 1: Recommend the Marine Safety Unit (MSU) Houma Officer in Charge, Marine Inspections (OCMI) initiate targeted outreach and training during Fishing Vessel Examiner Industry Days and dockside safety visits to promote awareness and voluntary compliance with ECOS use and modern wireless alternatives. Although not required for uninspected CFVs, the ECOS is a proven safety mechanism designed to shut down engine propulsion when an operator falls overboard, preventing runaway vessels and reducing search area drift. The USCG implemented a federal ECOS mandate in April 2021 for certain recreational vessels under 26 feet, citing its benefit in preventing operator fatalities and injuries caused by uncontrolled vessels. While this regulation does not apply to CFVs, it remains highly relevant, especially for solo operators working on small, open-deck platforms, such as those prevalent in the coastal Louisiana crabbing fleet. Many operators, like the master involved in this casualty, choose not to use the ECOS due to the inconvenience of traditional lanyards. However, recent advancements in electronic and wireless engine cut-off technology provide mariners with a safe and non-restrictive alternative, including wearable fobs and immersion-activated systems. By educating local mariners on the risks associated with non-use of ECOS devices and demonstrating the benefits of newer, mobility-friendly options, MSU Houma can promote a proactive culture of safety and potentially reduce future man-overboard fatalities. Encouraging voluntary ECOS use and promoting installation of wireless systems could significantly improve survivability for small-vessel commercial fishermen operating alone or in challenging environments.

Action: I Note that the MSU Houma OCMI concurred with this recommendation. The local unit will continue to educate its fishing industry partners on the benefits of utilizing ECOS devices and provide information on the wide variety of alternative ECOS systems (i.e., wireless options) available on the market today that eliminate the longstanding issue of immobility or entanglement that a lanyard type system can pose.

[redacted]

R. C. COMPHER
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Director of Inspections & Compliance (CG-5PC)

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16732

LOSS OF LIFE ON BOARD THE COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL LA6893ER ON LAKE CHIEN, LA ON OCTOBER 16, 2024

ENDORSEMENT BY THE COMMANDER, COAST GUARD HEARTLAND DISTRICT

The record and the report of the investigation convened for the subject casualty have been reviewed. The record and the report, including the findings of fact, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations are approved. It is recommended that this marine casualty investigation be closed.

COMMENTS ON THE REPORT

1. My sincerest condolences go out to the family and friends of the operator who lost his life in this tragic accident.

2. The investigation and report contain valuable information which can be used to address the factors that contributed to this marine casualty and prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.

ENDORSEMENT ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Safety Recommendation 1: 46 CFR Part 28 Subpart B lacks a mandate for commercial fishermen on all vessels to wear a Personal Floatation Device (PFD). 46 CFR 28.110(b) requires that a PFD be stowed in a readily accessible manner from either the berthing area, work area, or both. It is recommended the Commandant amend 46 CFR 28.110 and add language to make the wearing of a PFD required when working out on deck. The National Institute of Health and Safety (NIOSH) maintains a Commercial Fishing Incident Database (CFID) and has shown that the second most dangerous thing a fisherman faces is a fall overboard. From 2000-2019 there were 266 deaths from falls overboard, none of those victims were wearing a PFD. By mandating the wearing of a type of PFD while operating on the exposed decks of commercial fishing vessels, any fishermen who falls overboard would significantly increase their likelihood of remaining above water, spotted by search assets, and/or recovered.

Endorsement 1: I concur with the assessment and intent of the recommendation to enhance safety on commercial fishing vessels; however, added regulations requiring wear

of flotation devices is not recommended. The commercial fishing vessel industry is well aware of the risks associated with their occupation. Continued education through the CG's Commercial Fishing Vessel Program will continue. Following this incident, the U.S. Coast Guard updated the *Commercial Fishing Industry Vessels Best Safety Practices Guide* (December 2024). This update reinforced the critical importance of wearing appropriate Coast Guard-approved life jackets or buoyant work vests when working over or near water, especially during high-risk situations (e.g., at night, when working alone, while setting or hauling gear, in bad weather, when crossing hazardous bars). These flotation devices are designed to supplement, not replace, the Coast Guard-approved Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) required under 46 CFR § Part 28. This guidance aligns with existing Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations (29 CFR § 1926.106), which recommends the use of suitable flotation devices when the danger of drowning exists. The update offers comprehensive safety recommendations and is available online at:

https://www.dco.uscg.mil/Portals/9/DCO%20Documents/5p/CG-5PC/CG-CVC/CVC3/NCFSAC/2024/CFIV_Best_Practice_Guide.pdf

This link is also included in the Coast Guard Dockside Safety Examination form (CG-5587).

Some fishing vessel operators have expressed hesitation to wear a PFD while working on deck, citing concerns with getting entangled in fishing gear or rotating machinery. In these scenarios, selection of the best type of PFD is of paramount importance, and I urge Coast Guard Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examiners to familiarize themselves with these devices and conduct outreach and education on these potentially life-saving devices.

Given the established OSHA regulations (29 CFR § 1926.106) and the detailed guidance in *Commercial Fishing Industry Vessels Best Safety Practices Guide* (December 2024), the Coast Guard considers this safety recommendation to be adequately addressed.

Safety Recommendation 2: Recommend Commandant evaluate the feasibility of implementing the mandatory use of engine cut-off switches (ECOS) for commercial fishing vessels where the primary helm is not within an enclosed cabin, or at a minimum the mandatory use for single occupant operations. Section 8316 of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2021, which came into effect on April 1, 2021, requires individuals operating covered recreational vessels to use engine cut-off switches to reduce the number of runaway vessels and propeller strikes. Had a similar law been enacted to cover commercial fishing vessels, such as the one in this casualty, the master may have been more inclined to use the engine cut-off switch available for his vessel's engine, causing the engine to stop when he likely fell overboard, and potentially allowing for him to return safety to his vessel.

Endorsement 2: I concur with the intent of the safety recommendation to use ECOS for commercial fishing vessels, particularly for open hull one-person commercial fishing operations. This recommendation is both reasonable and prudent given the increased risks associated with operators working alone in dynamic and hazardous conditions, including low freeboard, slippery decks, and adverse weather, all of which increase the risk of man-overboard incidents; however, occupational challenges associated with tethered versions are recognized.

Modern, untethered ECOS technologies offer freedom of movement while maintaining critical safety functions, making them particularly well-suited for nearshore and inshore fisheries. I recommend that Commandant (CG-CVC-3) engage with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Commercial Fishing Safety Program to assess available ECOS technologies and explore opportunities for developing or adapting solutions compatible with both inboard and outboard propulsion systems. This analysis may support future consideration of regulatory changes requiring technologically advanced (one example: electronic) ECOS use in high-risk commercial fishing sectors.

Finally, we acknowledge that current safety regulations under 46 CFR Part 28 are voluntary for commercial fishing vessels operating within 3 nautical miles of the baseline, which is the operational area for most small-scale crabbing operations. Accordingly, outreach and education by our Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examiners (CFVE) remain the most appropriate tool for promoting voluntary adoption of ECOS technology.

Administrative Recommendation 1: Recommend the Marine Safety Unit Houma Officer in Charge, Marine Inspections (OCMI) initiate targeted outreach and training during Fishing Vessel Examiner Industry Days and dockside safety visits to promote awareness and voluntary compliance with engine cut-off-switch (ECOS) use and modern wireless alternatives. Although not required for uninspected commercial fishing vessels, the ECOS is a proven safety mechanism designed to shut down engine propulsion when an operator falls overboard, preventing runaway vessels and reducing search area drift. The U.S. Coast Guard implemented a federal ECOS mandate in April of 2021 for certain recreational vessels under 26 feet, citing its benefits in preventing operator fatalities, and injuries caused by uncontrolled vessels. While this regulation does not apply to commercial fishing vessels, it remains highly relevant, especially for solo operators working on small, open-deck platforms, such as those prevalent in the coastal Louisiana crabbing fleet. Many operators, like the master involved in this casualty, choose not to use ECOS due to the inconvenience of traditional lanyards. However, recent advancements in electronic and wireless engine cut-off technology provide mariners with a safe and non-restrictive alternative, including wearable fobs and immersion-activated systems. By educating local mariners on the risks associated with non-use of ECOS devices and demonstrating the benefits of the newer, mobility-friendly options, MSU Houma can promote a proactive culture of safety and potentially reduce future man-overboard fatalities. Encouraging voluntary ECOS use and promoting installation of wireless systems could significantly improve survivability for small commercial fisherman operating alone of in challenging environments.

Endorsement 1: I concur with this administrative recommendation. Outreach and education by our Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examiners (CFVE) remain the most appropriate tool for promoting safety and voluntary adoption of ECOS technology.

[redacted]

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By Direction

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16732
April 21, 2025

LOSS OF LIFE ON BOARD THE COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL LA6893ER ON LAKE CHIEN, LA, ON OCTOBER 16, 2024

ENDORSEMENT BY THE OFFICER IN CHARGE, MARINE INSPECTION

The record and the report of the investigation convened for the subject casualty have been reviewed. The record and the report, including the findings of fact, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations are approved subject to the following comments. It is recommended that this marine casualty investigation be closed.

ENDORSEMENT ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Safety Recommendation 1. 46 CFR Part 28 Subpart B lacks a mandate for commercial fishermen on all vessels to wear a Personal Floatation Device (PFD). 46 CFR 28.110(b) requires that a PFD be stowed in a readily accessible manner from either the berthing area, work area, or both. It is recommended Commandant amend 46 CFR 28.110 and add language to make the wearing of a PFD required when working out on deck. The National Institute of Health and Safety (NIOSH) maintains a Commercial Fishing Incident Database (CFID) and has shown that the second most dangerous thing a fisherman faces is a fall overboard. From 2000-2019 there were 266 deaths from falls overboard, none of those victims were wearing a PFD. By mandating the wearing of a PFD while operating on the exposed decks of commercial fishing vessels, any fishermen who falls overboard would significantly increase their likelihood of remaining above water, spotted by search assets, and/or recovered.

> **Endorsement:** Concur. This has been a longstanding, yet very easily mitigated, risk on commercial fishing vessels that has yet to be addressed through regulatory requirements. The data provided by NIOSH as well as prior U.S. Coast Guard marine casualty investigation statistics undoubtedly provides Commandant with enough information to drive a regulatory project addressing this gap in fisherman safety. Had the fishermen in this incident been wearing a PFD, the likelihood of him being recovered from the water and/or saving his life would have been significantly increased.

Safety Recommendation 2. Recommend Commandant evaluate the feasibility of implementing the mandatory use of engine cut-off switches (ECOS) for commercial fishing vessels where the primary helm is not within an enclosed cabin, or at a minimum the mandatory use for single occupant operations. Section 8316 of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2021, which came into effect on April 1, 2021, requires individuals operating covered recreational vessels to use engine cut-off switches to reduce the number of runaway vessels and propeller strikes. Had a similar law been enacted to cover commercial fishing vessels, such as the one in this casualty, the master may have been more inclined to use the engine cut-off switch available for his

vessel's engine, causing the engine to stop when he likely fell overboard, and potentially allowing for him to return safety to his vessel.

Endorsement: Concur; the required use of an ECOS or similar device in this incident would have allowed for the vessel to remain near to where the fisherman fell overboard, allowing him to potentially reboard or further signal for help. The Coast Guard has already identified, and recently mitigated, the risks to not using ECOS on certain recreational vessels. The same risks exist with commercial fishing vessel operations, especially with single occupant operations.

Administrative Recommendation 1. Recommend the Marine Safety Unit Houma Officer in Charge, Marine Inspections (OCMI) initiate targeted outreach and training during Fishing Vessel Examiner Industry Days and dockside safety visits to promote awareness and voluntary compliance with engine cut-off switch (ECOS) use and modern wireless alternatives. Although not required for uninspected commercial fishing vessels, the ECOS is a proven safety mechanism designed to shut down engine propulsion when an operator falls overboard, preventing runaway vessels and reducing search area drift. The U.S. Coast Guard implemented a federal ECOS mandate in April 2021 for certain recreational vessels under 26 feet, citing its benefit in preventing operator fatalities and injuries caused by uncontrolled vessels. While this regulation does not apply to commercial fishing vessels, it remains highly relevant, especially for solo operators working on small, open-deck platforms, such as those prevalent in the coastal Louisiana crabbing fleet. Many operators, like the master involved in this casualty, choose not to use the ECOS due to the inconvenience of traditional lanyards. However, recent advancements in electronic and wireless engine cut-off technology provide mariners with a safe and non-restrictive alternative, including wearable fobs and immersion-activated systems. By educating local mariners on the risks associated with non-use of ECOS devices and demonstrating the benefits of newer, mobility-friendly options, MSU Houma can promote a proactive culture of safety and potentially reduce future man-overboard fatalities. Encouraging voluntary ECOS use and promoting installation of wireless systems could significantly improve survivability for small-vessel commercial fishermen operating alone or in challenging environments.

Action: Concur; Marine Safety Unit Houma will continue to work with our fishing industry partners and provide further education to the fishing vessel fleet on the benefits of utilizing ECOS as well provide information on the wide variety of alternative ECOS systems (i.e. wireless) available on the market today that eliminate the longstanding issue of immobility or entanglement that the lanyard type systems pose.

Administrative Recommendation 2. Recommend this investigation be closed.

Endorsement: Concur; recommend this investigation be closed.

[redacted]

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16732
April 10, 2025

LOSS OF LIFE ON BOARD THE COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL LA6893ER ON LAKE CHIEN, LA, ON OCTOBER 16, 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On October 16, 2024, at approximately 2041 hours, U.S. Coast Guard Sector New Orleans received a report of an overdue fisherman operating the Commercial Fishing Vessel (CFV) LA6893ER, a 21-foot Carolina Skiff, in the vicinity of Lake Chien and Lake Felicity, LA. Earlier that day at approximately 0500, the vessel departed Chauvin, LA, with one person on board, the master, and was expected to return by 1700 that evening. After failing to return or make contact, family members provided the Coast Guard with the vessel's last known position and a search was initiated. A friend of the master located the vessel adrift at approximately 2213 hours with no one on board. The engine was still running and in gear, and the vessel had two lifejackets, the master's cell phone, and other personal items onboard. The vessel's rigging was found down, indicating that fishing operations were underway at the time of the incident.

Search and rescue assets from Coast Guard Air Station New Orleans, Station Grand Isle, Air Station Mobile, local law enforcement, and numerous Good Samaritans conducted an extensive search over a four-day period, covering approximately 3,030 square nautical miles. No signs of the master were found. It was later confirmed that the master did not typically wear a personal flotation device and did not use the vessel's engine cut-off switch, which was still intact when the vessel was recovered. The weather at the time included 21-knot winds and 3-foot seas. Search efforts were suspended on October 19, 2024; the master was never located and is presumed dead.

Through its investigation, the Coast Guard determined the initiating event for this incident to be the master falling overboard. This event subsequently led to the master's presumed loss of life. Causal factors contributing to this casualty were: 1) Failure of the master to utilize the vessel's engine cut-off switch, 2) Failure to wear a Personal Flotation Device (PFD), 3) Adverse sea conditions contributing to instability, 4) Limited communication capabilities on board the vessel, 5) Lack of regulatory requirements or operational policies to prevent solo operation, 6) Lack of regulatory requirements for PFD use on Commercial Fishing Vessels, and 7) Lack of voluntary Coast Guard Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Exam.

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
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16732
April 10, 2025

LOSS OF LIFE ON BOARD THE COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL LA6893ER ON LAKE CHIEN, LA, ON OCTOBER 16, 2024

INVESTIGATING OFFICER'S REPORT

1. Preliminary Statement

1.1. This marine casualty investigation was conducted, and this report was submitted in accordance with Title 46, Code of Federal Regulations, Subpart 4.07, and under the authority of Title 46, United States Code, Chapter 63.

1.2. No organizations or individuals were designated a party-in-interest in accordance with 46 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Subsection 4.03-10.

1.3. The Coast Guard was the lead agency for all evidence collection activities involving this investigation. No other persons or organizations assisted in this investigation.

1.4. All times listed in this report are in Central Standard Time using a 24-hour format and are approximate.

2. Vessels Involved in the Incident

Official Name/State Number:	LA6893ER
Hull Identification Number	EKHB1097I596
Flag:	United States
Vessel Class/Type/Sub-Type	Commercial Fishing Vessel (CFV), Pot/Trap
Build Year:	1996
Length:	21.0 feet
Main/Primary Propulsion:	Diesel Outboard, 200 HP
Owner:	[redacted]

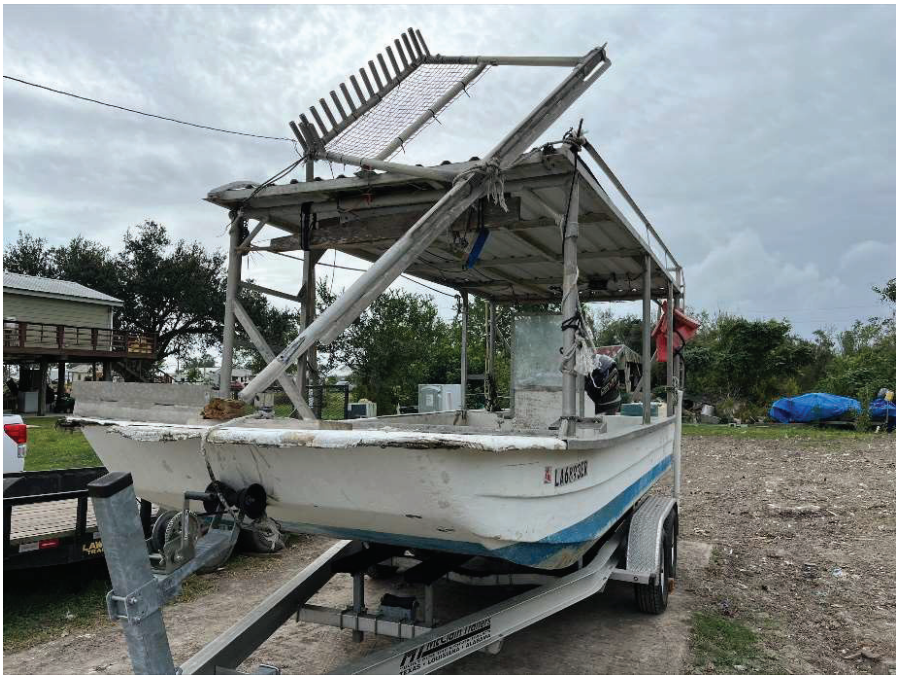


Figure 1. Bow of LA6893ER taken by USCG on 10/31/24.

3. Record of Deceased, Missing, and Injured

Relationship to Vessel	Sex	Age	Status
Master	M	66	Missing, presumed dead

4. Findings of Fact

4.1. The Incident:

4.1.1. On October 16, 2024, the commercial fishing vessel (CFV) LA6893ER, a 21-foot Carolina Skiff, departed from a private dock in Chauvin, LA at approximately 0500 for a routine day of crabbing operations with one person on board (POB), the master of the vessel.

4.1.2. The vessel was engaged in commercial crabbing operations in the vicinity of Lake Chien and Lake Felicity, LA, with an expected return time of approximately 1700 later that evening.

4.1.3. At 2041, Coast Guard Sector New Orleans received notification of an overdue vessel and initiated search and rescue operations. The reporting source was able to provide cell phone tracking data via Life360 for the master's phone, which indicated its last known location was in Lake Chien, west of Lake Raccourci and south of Lake Felicity.

4.1.4. At 2213, a fellow fisherman located the CFV LA6893ER adrift at position 29-10.548N / 090-26.922W with no persons on board. The vessel's engine was in gear and idling, and no debris field was observed in the surrounding area.

4.1.5. Two life jackets, a cell phone, and other personal effects were located on board. The vessel's rigging was down, consistent with ongoing crabbing operations at the time of the incident.

4.1.6. Between October 16 and October 19, 2024, search efforts were conducted in the surrounding area. A total of 3,030 square nautical miles were searched with no signs of the missing mariner. Search efforts were conducted by Coast Guard air and surface assets from Air Station New Orleans, Station Grand Isle, and Air Station Mobile, as well as from Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Southeast Louisiana Emergency Services, and multiple Good Samaritan vessels.

4.1.7. The Coast Guard suspended their active search efforts on October 19, 2024. The master was never located and is presumed dead.

4.2. Additional/Supporting Information:

4.2.1. The CFV LA6893ER was an uninspected commercial fishing vessel subject to the regulatory requirements of Title 46, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Subchapter C. It had never completed a voluntary commercial fishing vessel safety examination by the United States Coast Guard.

4.2.2. Environmental conditions during the search period included 21-knot winds, 3-foot seas, visibility of 10 nautical miles, air temperature of 72°F, and water temperature of 80°F.

4.2.3. The vessel was equipped with a VHF radio, but the radio lacked an antenna, significantly limiting its effective transmission range. It was reported that VHF communications would only be received when near the vessel.

4.2.4. The master had over 23 years of fishing experience in Louisiana waters and frequently operated alone.

4.2.5. The vessel's recent engine replacement allowed for a cruise speed of approximately 30 knots, with a slower speed of around 4 knots while tending to crab traps.

4.2.6. The master was reportedly last seen wearing a green slicker suit, white shrimp boots, and a thermal layer underneath.

4.2.7. The master did not typically wear a personal flotation device (PFD) during fishing operations. The vessel carried at least two PFDs on board at the time of the incident. Title 46 CFR Part 28 does not mandate PFD wear for commercial fishermen, only that serviceable PFDs be readily accessible near work and berthing areas.

4.2.8. Crab traps associated with the master were identified by white 8-inch Styrofoam floats marked with a blue "X." One trap found at position 29-19.848N / 090-27.507W contained fresh bait, suggesting the master had recently been at that location.

4.2.9. The vessel was equipped with an engine cut-off switch, which was still attached and un-activated when the vessel was located. It was reported that the engine cut-off switch was not normally used by the master during fishing operations due to its interference with deck mobility. There is not regulatory requirement for operators of commercial fishing vessels to utilize engine cut-off switches.

4.2.10. The vessel was recovered and trailered to a residence in Chauvin, LA. No structural deficiencies or anomalies were reported.

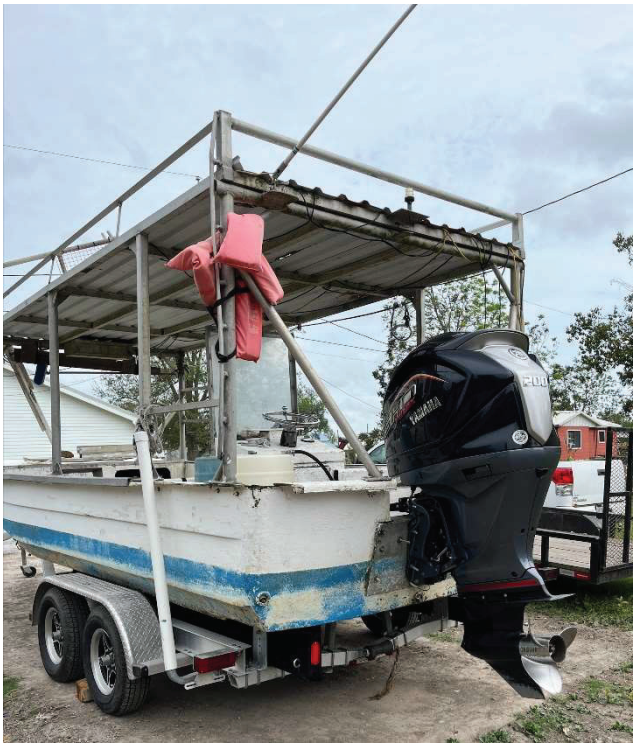


Figure 2. Stern of LA6893ER w/ location of PFDs.
Taken by USCG on 10/31/24.

4. Analysis

5.1. **Failure of the master to utilize the vessel's engine cut-off switch.** The CFV LA6893ER was equipped with a standard engine cut-off switch (ECOS), a safety mechanism designed to immediately stop engine propulsion when the operator is unexpectedly displaced from the helm. Post-incident examination of the vessel confirmed that the ECOS remained installed, the lanyard was attached to the helm, and the switch had not been engaged. Interviews with family members indicated that the Master routinely chose not to use the ECOS link during fishing operations, citing interference with mobility around the deck while setting and retrieving crab traps. This practice, while within current regulatorly requirements, was high risk. As of April 1, 2021, federal law mandates that operators of certain recreational vessels under 26 feet in length use an engine cut-off switch while operating, however this law

does not apply to low-speed applications such as fishing. ECOS systems are vital to preventing runaway vessel scenarios, protecting both operators and nearby mariners from the dangers of unmanned, powered craft. In this case, after the presumed fall overboard, the vessel continued underway in gear. This not only allowed the vessel to drift far from the incident site but also eliminated any possibility for the Master to swim back to the vessel. Had the engine been shut down automatically, the vessel may have remained within reachable distance or served as a stationary marker for SAR units. Furthermore, the safety risk could have been mitigated using modern electronic ECOS technology, such as wireless fobs which do not restrict operator movement. These systems can trigger engine shutdown upon water immersion or loss of signal. If CFV LA6893ER had been outfitted with such a system, or had the ECOS already installed on the vessel been utilized, the engine could have been shut down immediately upon the Master entering the water, potentially have enabling his recovery or return to the vessel.

5.2. **Failure to wear a Personal Flotation Device (PFD).** At the time of the incident, the master was not wearing a personal flotation device, despite the presence of two serviceable PFDs on board. This reflects a longstanding and widespread practice among commercial fishermen to forego wearing PFDs during active deck work due to concerns about comfort, mobility, and entanglement with gear. While not required under federal regulations for commercial fishing vessels of this size and category, the absence of PFD usage introduces a significant risk in man-overboard situations, especially in solo operation if the Master falls overboard there is no one to throw them the PFD. In this case, no witnesses observed the master falling overboard, and no immediate distress signal was received. A properly worn PFD could have kept the master afloat for a longer period, increased visibility to SAR units, and substantially improved the chances of recovery. In water temperatures around 80°F with generally favorable visibility, survival time could have been extended significantly with flotation support. Had a PFD been worn, the probability of a successful recovery during the multi-day search operation could have increased.

5.3. **Adverse sea conditions contributing to instability.** Weather conditions at the time of the incident included sustained winds of 21 knots and seas averaging approximately 3 feet. Given the small size and light displacement of the CFV LA6893ER, such conditions can cause significant rolling and pitching, especially during slow-speed operations associated with crabbing. The master was likely working traps near the gunwale while the vessel was idling at a low speed, estimated to be around 4 knots. The combination of reduced vessel stability due to the sea conditions and the need for constant movement on the deck to manage gear increased the potential for accidental loss of balance. The master was likely standing near the gunwale or leaning over while deploying or retrieving traps at the time of the incident. In such conditions, even minor loss of footing or an unanticipated vessel roll could result in a fall overboard. If the weather and sea state had been calmer, or if operations had been delayed, the risk of losing balance or footing while working on deck would have been reduced, potentially preventing the casualty.

5.4. **Limited communication capabilities on board the vessel.** The vessel's only known means of communication was a VHF marine radio that lacked a functioning antenna. This severely restricted transmission range, rendering the unit ineffective beyond line-of-sight

distances. Given the vessel's solo operation in remote and marshy waterways, effective communication equipment was critical for both routine check-ins and emergency situations. No distress call was received from the vessel, and the master's fall overboard likely occurred without any transmitted signal. While not required by law or regulation for this type of operation, the absence of a backup communication device, such as a satellite-enabled personal locator beacon (PLB) or automatic identification system (AIS) with man-overboard alert, further reduced the possibility of timely notification to responders. Had a properly functioning VHF antenna or emergency signaling device been on board and utilized, notification of the incident may have occurred sooner, enabling a more targeted and time-sensitive response during the early hours of the search.

5.5. **Lack of regulatory requirements or operational policies to prevent solo operation.** At the time of the incident, the master was operating the CFV LA6893ER alone, an accepted but inherently hazardous practice in the small-vessel commercial fishing community. No federal regulation prohibits solo operation of commercial fishing vessels, nor was there any indication that the operator was subject to external policies that would have required a second crewmember on board. Operating alone eliminates the possibility of immediate assistance, witness reports, or rapid emergency response in the event of a man-overboard situation. The absence of any alert mechanism or secondary watchstanders greatly increases the risk of undetected casualty events. In this case, no person was present to observe the fall, activate a man-overboard alert, or initiate a search. The vessel was only discovered adrift hours later by a friend conducting a voluntary search. If even one additional crewmember had been on board, the chances of noticing and reacting to the incident would have improved significantly, possibly enabling rescue before the situation became unrecoverable.

5.6. **Lack of regulatory requirements for PFD use on Commercial Fishing Vessels.** It is common practice for commercial fishermen to not wear PFDs while working out on deck, likely due to the lack of maneuverability when wearing one and handling fishing gear. While Title 46 CFR Part 28 requires the presence of PFDs on board commercial fishing vessels, there is no law or regulation that requires crewmembers to physically wear any type of PFD while working near the side of a vessel, just that the PFD be readily accessible. PFDs are crucial to keeping persons afloat and enable rescue of persons in the water. Even if the person wearing a PFD is unconscious, the floatation will enable recovery of the person in the water. Had the master been required by law to wear a PFD, it is likely that he would have been recovered during the search.

5.7. **Lack of voluntary Coast Guard Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Exam.** At the time of the casualty, the CFV LA6893ER had never undergone a voluntary Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examination (CFVSE) conducted by the U.S. Coast Guard. While not required by federal regulation for this specific vessel's operations, voluntary CFVSE's offer operators the opportunity to receive a comprehensive review of vessel safety equipment, emergency procedures, and best practices. In this case, several key risk factors, including non-use of the engine cut-off switch, limited VHF radio capability, and the lack of emergency signaling devices, may have been identified and corrected through a safety exam. Additionally, operators often receive tailored guidance on man-overboard prevention, PFD usage, and risk mitigation while working alone or in inclement weather. The master routinely

operated solo, with limited safety infrastructure onboard and no external oversight on procedural safeguards. Had the vessel undergone a recent voluntary safety exam, it is likely that recommendations for improving operational safety, particularly for solo operators, would have been provided and potentially implemented, reducing the likelihood or severity of the incident.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Determination of Cause:

6.1.1. The initiating event for this casualty occurred when the master fell overboard from the LA6893ER. Causal factors leading to this event were:

6.1.1.1. The adverse sea conditions contributing to instability.

6.1.2. The master falling overboard led to the subsequent event of the presumed death of master. Causal factors leading to this event were:

6.1.2.1. The failure of the master to utilize the vessel's engine cut-off switch.

6.1.2.2. The failure by the master to wear to a Personal Floatation Device.

6.1.2.3. Limited communication capabilities on board the vessel.

6.1.2.4. The lack of requirements for PFD use on Commercial Fishing Vessels.

6.1.2.5. Lack of regulatory requirements or operational policies to prevent solo operation

6.1.2.6. Lack of voluntary Coast Guard Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Exam.

6.2. Evidence of Acts by any Coast Guard Credentialed Mariner Subject to Action Under 46 USC Chapter 77: This investigation did not identify any evidence of acts by any Coast Guard credentialed mariners subject to action under 46 USC Chapter 77.

6.3. Evidence of Acts or Violations of Law by U.S. Coast Guard Personnel, or any other person: There were no potential acts of misconduct, incompetence, negligence, unskillfulness, or violations of law by Coast Guard employees or any other person that contributed to this casualty.

6.4. Evidence of Acts Subject to Civil Penalty: This investigation did not identify any evidence of acts subject to civil penalty.

6.5. Evidence of Criminal Act(s): This investigation did not identify potential violations of criminal law.

6.6. Need for New or Amended U.S. Law or Regulation: This investigation identified the need to require mariners to wear a personal floatation device while working outside on the

deck of a Commercial Fishing Vessel. Further, this investigation identified the need to require the mandatory use of ECOS on certain Commercial Fishing Vessels. See section 8.1 below for recommended actions.

6.7. Unsafe Actions or Conditions that were not Causal Factors: This investigation did not identify potential unsafe actions or conditions that were not causal factors.

7. Actions Taken Since the Incident

7.1 No actions have been taken since the incident occurred.

8. Recommendations

8.1. Safety Recommendations:

8.1.1 46 CFR Part 28 Subpart B lacks a mandate for commercial fishermen on all vessels to wear a Personal Floatation Device (PFD). 46 CFR 28.110(b) requires that a PFD be stowed in a readily accessible manner from either the berthing area, work area, or both. It is recommended Commandant amend 46 CFR 28.110 and add language to make the wearing of a PFD required when working out on deck. The National Institute of Health and Safety (NIOSH) maintains a Commercial Fishing Incident Database (CFID) and has shown that the second most dangerous thing a fisherman faces is a fall overboard. From 2000-2019 there were 266 deaths from falls overboard, none of those victims were wearing a PFD. By mandating the wearing of a PFD while operating on the exposed decks of commercial fishing vessels, any fishermen who falls overboard would significantly increase their likelihood of remaining above water, spotted by search assets, and/or recovered.

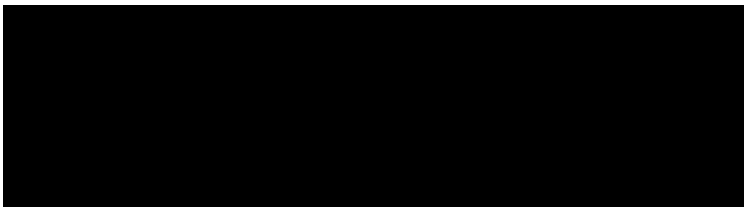
8.1.2 Recommend Commandant evaluate the feasibility of implementing the mandatory use of engine cut-off switches (ECOS) for commercial fishing vessels where the primary helm is not within an enclosed cabin, or at a minimum the mandatory use for single occupant operations. Section 8316 of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2021, which came into effect on April 1, 2021, requires individuals operating covered recreational vessels to use engine cut-off switches to reduce the number of runaway vessels and propeller strikes. Had a similar law been enacted to cover commercial fishing vessels, such as the one in this casualty, the master may have been more inclined to use the engine cut-off switch available for his vessel's engine, causing the engine to stop when he likely fell overboard, and potentially allowing for him to return safety to his vessel.

8.2. Administrative Recommendations:

8.2.1 Recommend the Marine Safety Unit Houma Officer in Charge, Marine Inspections (OCMI) initiate targeted outreach and training during Fishing Vessel Examiner Industry Days and dockside safety visits to promote awareness and voluntary compliance with engine cut-off switch (ECOS) use and modern wireless alternatives. Although not required for uninspected commercial fishing vessels, the ECOS is a proven safety mechanism designed to shut down engine propulsion when an operator falls overboard, preventing runaway vessels and reducing search area drift. The U.S.

proven safety mechanism designed to shut down engine propulsion when an operator falls overboard, preventing runaway vessels and reducing search area drift. The U.S. Coast Guard implemented a federal ECOS mandate in April 2021 for certain recreational vessels under 26 feet, citing its benefit in preventing operator fatalities and injuries caused by uncontrolled vessels. While this regulation does not apply to commercial fishing vessels, it remains highly relevant, especially for solo operators working on small, open-deck platforms, such as those prevalent in the coastal Louisiana crabbing fleet. Many operators, like the master involved in this casualty, choose not to use the ECOS due to the inconvenience of traditional lanyards. However, recent advancements in electronic and wireless engine cut-off technology provide mariners with a safe and non-restrictive alternative, including wearable fobs and immersion-activated systems. By educating local mariners on the risks associated with non-use of ECOS devices and demonstrating the benefits of newer, mobility-friendly options, MSU Houma can promote a proactive culture of safety and potentially reduce future man-overboard fatalities. Encouraging voluntary ECOS use and promoting installation of wireless systems could significantly improve survivability for small-vessel commercial fishermen operating alone or in challenging environments.

8.2.2. Recommend this investigation be closed.



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