

French trawler in dramatic accident in Dingle

On the 26th of November 2022 a French trawler was manoeuvring in Dingle marina when it got jammed in reverse and smashed straight into the pontoon seriously damaging several small boats.

The accident happened on Friday afternoon when the French trawler (The Bikain) collided with the pontoon and boats. The trawler is a local among the vast number of different fishing vessels using Dingle marina each year. The trawler was well known in the local area as it had been into Dingle marina almost every week for the past 10 years. It was preparing to put out to sea on a fishing trip. Initially it was unclear as to what caused the vessel to move in such an unusual way.

A local fisherman, quoted in afloat.ie, whose boat was in the accident said "Local sources say that the boat's control system had failed and locked her into "full astern" and she burst her mooring ropes as she broke loose on a direct course for the nearby marina. It is a particularly dangerous fault if a Morse gear cable breaks as when you are not slowing down and you speed up the engine thinking you have changed gears and all you do is keep ploughing on faster in whatever gear you were in, it takes a little while for it to register what is happening and then it's too late and a collision is hard to avoid".

There were a total of 6 smaller motorboats damaged, including dinghies, ribs and yachts, and the southern section of the marina infrastructure was either capsized or damaged in the collision. Thankfully there were no injuries.

There was a total of 6 million euro worth of damage done to the pontoon along with the boats, and plans to start rebuilding the southern part of the marina. Local officials say the rebuild will start early April 2023.

It could be well into summer of 2023 before the pontoon is rebuilt. Inevitably this will disturb planned regattas, including the All-Ireland Coastal Rowing Championships that are due to be hosted in Dingle's marina in early August 2023. This has caused great upset for the Rowing community in Dingle as their capacity for training has been severely curtailed by the damage from the crash.

A local family had a very lucky escape as their boat had been removed from the water for winter storage approximately half an hour before the incident occurred. Tiernan Courtney outlined how close to disaster they came,

"It was Saturday afternoon and I was taking my boat out of the water to do a few winter jobs to it. About 30 minutes later I got a phone call to say a boat had crashed into the pontoon where my boat had been parked. The French owned trawler had got stuck in gear and went straight into the pontoon sinking a boat worth over 300,000. I'm still shocked at how close we came to losing our boat. We were so unbelievably lucky that we took the boat out of the water that afternoon."

Another boat owner, John Holden, spoke about his relief at having removed his boat the previous day, "I can only imagine the tragedies which could easily have occurred if the trawler had lost control at any point earlier in the day as so many people were on the pontoon removing their boats for the winter. A lot of manpower is required to get boats of the water. It's a miracle no one was on the pontoon on what had been a very Saturday afternoon."

This dangerous mishap was very distressing for those whose boats suffered damage as they now have the inconvenience of having to go through the insurance process to claim the money to replace their boats. It's also very fortunate that this did not happen during the summer months, as there would have been many leisure yachts moored on that visitor pontoon and there could have been multiple casualties.