

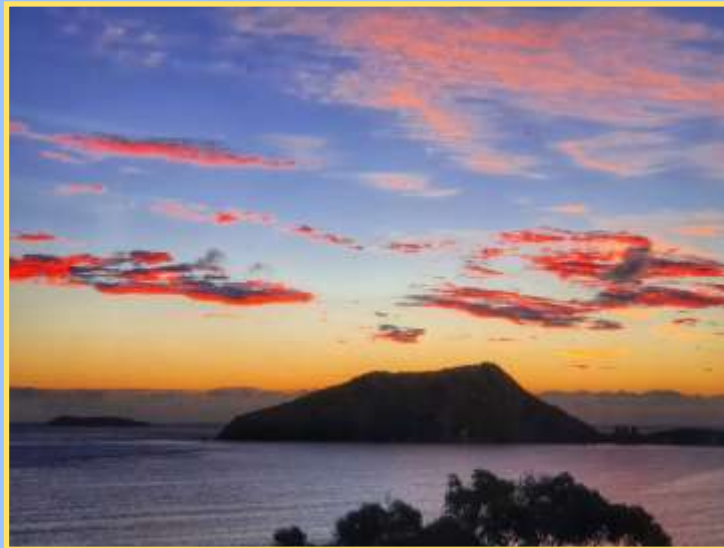
# PORT CHATTER



AUTUMN 2021  
MARCH

## MARINE RESCUE NSW PORT STEPHENS UNIT

*'Volunteers Saving Lives on the Water'*





## MARINE RESCUE NSW – PORT STEPHENS UNIT

Postal Address: PO Box 20, Nelson Bay, NSW 2315

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Phone: (02) 4981 3585

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## VOLUNTEERS SAVING LIVES ON THE WATER

### UNIT APPOINTMENTS

<b>Patrons: Kate Washington MP, State Member Port Stephens</b> <b>Meryl Swanson MP, Federal Member Paterson</b> <b>Stephen Bromhead LLM MP, State Member Myall Lakes</b> <b>The Hon. Dr David Gillespie MP, Federal Member Lyne</b>		Social Committee: Lisa Lodding Webmaster: Vacant Donation Boxes: Robbie Eather
<b>Unit Commander Ben van der Wijngaart</b> <b>Welfare / Liaison Harold Gibson</b> Assistant Jenny Fitzsimons <b>Protocol Officer Harold Gibson</b>		<b>Corporate Services Administration Officer Jenni Fryer</b> <b>Assistant Krystyna Winslow</b> Clerical Assistance Erica Smith Security Officer John Smith WH&S Officer Riko Eguchi Honours/Awards Jenni Fryer Providedore Jenny Fitzsimmons and Deb Buckley Comms Centre Service Julia Lynch Data / Stats Maureen Wheatley Supply Margaret & Andrew Morrison Membership Loris Webster & Erica Smith Property Officer Trevor Brighton Maintenance Team Trevor Brighton Jim Christie Electricians Doug Craike & Dieter Greiter
<b>Deputy Unit Commander Colin Couper</b> Emergency Services Liaison Officer Laurie Nolan Data Management/Network/Comms Lee Ryman, Brian Richardson, Robert Johnson, Dieter Grieter		<b>Nelson Head Reserve Committee</b> Chairman John Reid Deputy Chairman Greg Walsh Treasurer Adrian Hill Secretary Ross Debenham Committee Jenny Fitzsimons Harold Gibson Cottage Curator Vacant Property Officer Trevor Brighton Historian Paul Farnhill Port Stephens Historical Society Dennis Corr Tea Rooms Liaison Vacant Wedding Events Co-ordinator: Jenni Fryer Assistant Greg Walsh Tours Kevin Griffey
<b>Operations</b> <b>Acting Operations Officer Sue Freeman</b> Assistant Operations Officer Communications Centre Manager Nigel Eves Assistant Manager Dee Gilliland Rosters Manager Will Scott Assistant Angela O'Dea Duty Callout Officers: Neil Fraser, Fank Van Druen, Trevor Brighton Radio Club Manager Elizabeth Francis Rescue Vessels Manager Tony O'Donell Assistant Manager Vacant Ashes Scattering Coordinator Harold Gibson Chief Engineer Bill Haskell R.F.S. Liaison: Lower Hunter Ross Debenham Hunter Valley Colin Couper Coxswains Sue Freeman, Robert Johnson, Laurie Nolan, Brian Bibbing, Iain Blackadder, Mick Duggan		The <i>Port Chatter</i> is the quarterly publication of Marine Rescue NSW, Port Stephens unit. It is available free to all members of the unit, its advertisers, sponsors, and other interested members of the community. <b>Contributions</b> are most welcome from all members, advertisers, sponsors or other interested community members. They should be accompanied by the author's name, address and phone number, and can be emailed to the editor at <a href="mailto:editor.portstephens@marinerescuensw.com.au">editor.portstephens@marinerescuensw.com.au</a> . Contributions are subject to review by the Executive Committee prior to publishing. <b>Advertising</b> enquiries are welcomed. Contact the editor at <a href="mailto:editor.portstephens@marinerescuensw.com.au">editor.portstephens@marinerescuensw.com.au</a> for more information. <b>Sponsors</b> can make <b>tax-deductible</b> donations to Marine Rescue NSW Port Stephens. All sponsorships will be acknowledged in <i>Port Chatter</i> if requested. <b>Cover Photograph</b> - Stephen Alta and Tony O'Donnell
<b>Unit Training</b> <b>Unit Training Officer Ray McLeod</b> Assistant Training Officer Paul Kelly Training Systems Officer Angela O'Dea, Jan Sami Rescue Vessels Training Officer Brian Bibbing Course Presenters: Paul Buckley, Colin Couper Peter Dentrinos, Neil Fraser, Trevor Moxham, Ben van der Wijngaart Provisional Member Support Angela Tilling, Krystyna Winslow		
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## OUR PRIMARY FOCUS

Saving lives at sea on open and closed waters in and around Port Stephens

### MARINE RESCUE NSW – PORT STEPHENS UNIT SERVICES PROVIDED



**Category One Marine Search and Rescue Co-ordination Centre (SARCC).** Located at the former Inner Light and now Heritage Site at Nelson Head, 32°42.632 S; 152°09.667 E (overlooking Shoal Bay and looking out through the entrance to Port Stephens). Accredited by the State Rescue Board.

**Communications Centre, Nelson Head - VMR217.** Operated by trained and qualified volunteers, 24 hours a day; 7 days a week; 365 days a year. Monitoring 27MHz, and VHF marine frequencies, emergency and calling channels. Open during each day to the visiting public.

Apart from radio coverage generally to the local boating community, the Communications Centre offers:

- Emergency support to vessels in trouble
- Emergency and routine after hours communications for Rural Fire Service operating in the Lower Hunter and Hunter Valley districts
- A Marine Radio Safety (MRS) service – Boat Register
- A checkpoint and radio coverage for recreational vessels transiting up and down the coastline adjacent to Port Stephens.
- Weather readings and local conditions observations and
- Current Bureau of Meteorology weather forecasts and tidal information. (These can be obtained by contacting the Comms Centre by phone or radio and are also offered in regular radio skeds).

**Accredited Rescue Vessels** Available on a 24 hr call-out basis, subject to Police tasking. (See 'Rescue Vessels' page).

**Weather recording facility** Accredited by the Bureau of Meteorology. Regular reports on local conditions are electronically communicated to the Bureau, as well as to Radio, TV and Print media outlets in the local area.

**Nelson Head Reserve and Heritage Inner Light Cottage.** The Nelson Bay Unit of Marine Rescue NSW is responsible to the State Government for upkeep of this heritage precinct, through its 'Nelson Head Lighthouse and Rescue Station Reserve Trust Management Sub-committee' (which includes a representative of the Port Stephens Historical Society).

A small museum is operated by volunteers and is open to the public, 7 days a week from 10am to 4pm.

A portion of the building is leased to a private operator for morning/afternoon teas/coffee and lunches.

Wedding Ceremonies. Bookings can be made to hold these in the grounds (see Lighthouse Weddings page).

Below the Comms Centre, on the ground floor, is a tourist Gift Shop operated by Marine Rescue Port Stephens. Without profits from the Gift Shop, together with support from the local community, clubs and businesses, the Unit would find it very difficult, if not near impossible, to operate.

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## UNIT COMMANDER'S REPORT

### UNIT COMMANDER



I won't yet give up my day job, but I'm thinking there may be an opening in the 'prophet' business for me. After predicting that this last Summer could have been a 'trying' one in the last edition of Port Chatter, we certainly were not short-changed in what happened!

December saw Marine Rescue Port Stephens

dealing with 433 vessel log-ons with 1153 persons on board and responding to a total of 26 incidents, three of which were MAYDAYs. Things heated up in January with 792 log-ons with 2198 persons on board and us responding to 42 incidents, nine of which were MAYDAY calls. On one single day in January we had 80 log-ons and responded to 11 incidents with both our boats continuously on the water for 14 hours with only a two hour break.

A couple of messages could be drawn from that experience, I suppose.

1. Being out on the water requires great care and preparation, no less in boat maintenance and safety equipment serviceability and use.
2. You shouldn't be embarrassed to call on Marine Rescue services – a lot of people are doing it!

I don't mean to start a fashion trend, but don't leave it too late to call for help so that a simple tow assist turns into a MAYDAY.



One good lesson that came out of the Summer MAYDAY calls was the rescue of the four young guys from the capsized vessel off Broughton Is. Their safety equipment clearly saved them – in particular, their 'Life Cell' containing flares and an EPIRB.

On a sadder note, we also mourned the 'crossing of the bar' of our beloved crew-mate **Barney Pinney** with the scattering of his ashes on Sunday 7 February.



A true testament to Barney's reputation and the esteem with which he was held was the number of our unit members who turned out for his guard of honour and farewell salute on the D'Albora breakwater that day.

Barney had the last laugh that day though. The Port Stephens Water Police had thoughtfully volunteered to join the line of vessels escorting Barney's ashes out to the site of the ceremony, but minutes before departure these plans were interrupted with a MAYDAY call from a vessel in strife on the Eastern face of Boondelbah Is. This lost us the police escort as well as our own PS30 which made a record nine minute transit to Boondelbah, leaving our PS31 escorted by our sister unit's Lemon Tree Passage vessel LT30. However, they were able to join the ceremony later.

It could not have been a more symbolic send-off for someone who has been involved in so many similar responses to saving lives at sea.

**Ben van der Wijngaart**



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## DEPUTY UNIT COMMANDER

### DEPUTY UNIT COMMANDER

The MRNSW IT Steering Group has been formed with seven Units invited to participate. Port Stephens has accepted this opportunity to be part of the feedback loop to our HO IT team and provide advice from the frontline. Thank you Howard Faulks for taking on this role.

The Port Stephens Emergency Management Committee has representatives from Port Stephens Council, NSW Police, SES, RAAF, Newcastle Airport, Transport for NSW, NSW Health, Ausgrid, AGL, Port Stephens Lifeguards and of course Marine Rescue Port Stephens, represented by our Emergency Services Liaison Officer (ESLO), Watch Officer and Coxswain Laurie Nolan.

The Committee meets every two months to report on and discuss subjects pertinent to each agency's area. Topics raised at the November meeting included the COVID pandemic, the effects of weather events on the LGA, the M1 motorway extension to Raymond Terrace and the Nelson Bay Road upgrade. Also reported on were upcoming events for Port Stephens, Newcastle Airport and Ausgrid operations and evacuation plans in various geographical areas.

The MRPS report covered such areas as our operations under COVID restrictions, the rescue operations we undertook, the introduction of the state-wide Seahawk Incident Management System (IMS) and the availability of our two vessels.



The Port Stephens base SARRC is an Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) should a disaster occur that requires the Port Stephens Local Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN) be activated, probably for a disaster along the coast. The Lead Agency is likely to be the NSW Police however MRPS would be assisting with our vessels on water and as support personnel at the EOC.

MRPS Watch Officers are familiar with the role of an EOC as part of their completing the MRNSW WO training handbook and obtaining the Watch Officer rating.

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## FIRST WEEK AS DUTY SKIPPER

### IAIN BLACKADDER - COXSWAIN

*Often, our stories are about the more dramatic incidents involving our Unit. This edition we bring you something different as we talk to our recently qualified Coxswain, Iain Blackadder about his first week as a Unit Duty Skipper.*



I gained my Coxswain qualification in mid-December and subsequently accepted the role of Duty Skipper. At the time, the Unit was desperately short of volunteers available to fill the role, so my first week of duty rolled around very quickly.

“Stay confident, be bold, take charge of each situation” were the words of advice I had received from other Duty

Skippers. I wasn't concerned or stressed about my first week as the training and operational experience provided me with the skills and knowledge needed to do my job.

So, what exactly are the requirements of a **Duty Skipper** – on call 24 hours for the next 7 days, be no more than 20

minutes from the Marine Rescue Dock (Bunnings is ok!), and no alcohol! Just a few of the requirements, or as one Duty Skipper puts it – Home Detention!

My first day as Duty Skipper was normal Saturday training. After a few light-hearted pokes at the newbie, off we went. An uneventful routine training day where we practiced vessel handling, towing and rafting a vessel, and placing a vessel on a mooring. Much discussion about the next day when we were to be involved in the scattering of the Ashes of our fellow Coxswain, Barney Pinney.

I woke on Sunday morning a little sombre and reflective as the major task today was the Ashes scattering.

After a shower and a light breakfast, a look at the Sunday paper was interrupted around 0845 with the familiar ringtone of the mobile phone. A vessel with battery problems near The Sisters, Broughton Island needed our help.



Off I went. First job, The Sisters, Broughton Island. Not the greatest of places given the shallow waters and bommies which abound up there but at least the distressed vessel is anchored and safe.

About an hour later we have passed over a jump starter pack and the distressed vessel engine fires up. Happy days. We shadow the vessel back to Little Beach boat ramp and then return to our berth for a quick debrief and I am home by 1100 for a shower and lunch before returning to the Dock by 1230 to prepare for the Ashes scattering.

Preparations complete. Barney's family arrive and life jackets are fitted and safety briefing provided in readiness to leave at 1430.

About 1420, we were sitting in Port Stephens 31 doing the last of the paperwork when the words **May Day** were heard on VHF16. A seafarer never wants to hear these words.

Vessel in distress off Boondelbah Island outside the Heads. I heard enough to muster a crew and send Port Stephens 30 out to assist. About the same time, the Port Stephens Water Police also leave their Dock to attend at high speed.

Port Stephens 31 is now ready to leave the Dock with Barney's Ashes and his family safely on board and as we slowly leave the Marina, we pass about 40 of Barney's Marine Rescue colleagues who have formed a guard of honour on the breakwall.

As we proceed from the Marina, we also hear on the radio that Port Stephens 30 has rescued one person stranded on rocks while the Water Police have rescue two others and have the distressed vessel under tow. A short time later, both vessels are able to join us.

In a very moving ceremony, our friend Barney was laid to rest and I felt privileged and honoured to have played a small part.

Back to the Dock, shut down and off home.

Monday morning meant a few home chores and waiting to see what the day might bring. Nothing. No calls. Which meant no incidents and no-one in trouble.

Tuesday is again a crew training day until about 1145 when a call came through about a yacht with motor problems on a mooring in Providence Bay, north side of Broughton Island.

With eight people on board Port Stephens 31, we head back to the Dock to offload some crew and as I have an appointment in Newcastle and have arranged for another Coxswain to cover for me in the afternoon, I stand down.

When the job is completed at Broughton Island and I returned from Newcastle, I resumed my Duty Skipper with a message to say that the distressed yacht would require

*(Continued on page 11)*

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## FIRST WEEK AS DUTY SKIPPER

(Continued from page 9)

further assistance on Wednesday morning. I had a quick chat with the OPSO about tasking, arranged a crew to assist on Wednesday morning, and advised maintenance crew that Port Stephens 31 would be needed in the morning.

On Wednesday morning, I am at the Dock by 0745 ready to assist the yacht. However, we commenced our routine Wednesday vessel maintenance tasks before we did anything else. Our Unit is fortunate to have a dedicated team of volunteers who every Wednesday morning give up a couple of hours to check and maintain equipment on our vessels. Our crews greatly appreciate their hard work.

We watched as the distressed yacht was lowered back into the water by the mobile hoist at The Boat Yard. We then came along -side to raft up to the yacht with a couple of tricky moments as we drifted and thanks to the actions of crew, we get things under control very quickly. Our task is to place the distressed yacht on the Public Wharf. However, there were vessels already on the wharf and this meant a quick change of plan and we placed the yacht on an emergency mooring just outside the marina. We then received advice that we could place the yacht on the end of the wharf so we again raft up and moved the vessel to the wharf. With the job done, we returned to our Dock and finished maintenance tasks at about 1130.

I completed a bit of shopping before returning to Dock at 1330 and assisted a Leading Crew trainee with signoff of his Skills Log. All trainees are required to complete a Skills Log recording the demonstration of skills and competency. Each skill requires Skipper signoff of tasks relating to various boat activities and knowledge requirement in order to obtain an operational rating. For example, I have had over 150 tasks signed off in my Skills Log, with all requiring three signatures.

Just as we are finishing our training session, a very familiar ringtone of the mobile phone was heard and I am advised a vessel with fuel problems and needing our assistance is located off Shark Island. I already had two crew at the Dock, and needed one more before setting out.

We located the vessel at anchor and took it under tow back to Little Beach boat ramp and returned to our Dock by 1730.

As we had night training scheduled later, I quickly called

the Boat Training Officer to advise that one crew member and I will be a little late for night training before heading home for dinner.



Wednesday 1900, back at Dock for a night training exercise involving a navigation run up to Karuah and return via Snapper Island. It is the first time up that way at night for some crew and trainees, so I allocated trainees on helm and on watch for navigation lights to give them experience

in this new environment. Shallow water, narrow channels and lots of flashing lights required concentration and made for an interesting experience. We need to train at night in all weather conditions so that our crews can respond quickly in an emergency. We are back to our Dock at about 2230 and I headed home for some sleep.

Thursday morning and I concentrated on home duties, gardening etc and thankfully I received no callouts so no one in trouble.

Friday, just after 1000, we were tasked to assist a yacht in trouble in Fingal Bay. We discovered the distressed yacht had a delivery crew on board who were taking the yacht north to a new owner and it had a fuel filter issue that required a change to the filter. As the yacht had been sold, all tools etc had been removed and the crew simply needed delivery of some tools to assist them make repairs. We didn't have the necessary tools at our Dock and our Chief Engineer was able to assist and delivered the required tools to Dock.

We arrived at the distressed vessel at about 1200 and passed the tools over and remained on standby while the crew tried to change the filter and make repairs. We received a radio message to say the crew was experiencing further problems while trying to change the filter so we set up to tow the yacht back to a mooring so the crew could come ashore to arrange repairs. By 1430 we had the yacht safely on a mooring and had transferred the crew to shore, and had secured and closed our vessel by 1515.

My usual Friday afternoon includes an informal social gathering of friends at Little Beach for a cold drink, some nibbles and chat. Home or Little Beach? Little Beach wins but no cold drink, just a water!

Nothing happened over Friday night and I hand over on Saturday morning to the next Duty Skipper to bring an end to my first week as a Duty Skipper.

***Iain Blackadder***

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## COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND GIFT SHOP

### COMMUNITY RELATIONS OFFICER

With the easing of COVID-19 restrictions across NSW, our Home Office has rolled back our Marine Rescue restrictions to Level One. This has allowed us to once again resume fundraising and community awareness activities aimed at communicating to the public the need for safety and safe boating practices.

This means we can get almost back to where we were. We kicked things off the last weekend in February with our first Bunnings BBQ since early December. Bunnings has laid down strict guidelines and monitoring to ensure these community BBQs are COVIDSafe.

We will follow that in early March with a community information table at Salamander Square Shopping Centre on March



6th. This will give us the opportunity to chat with the public, sell raffle tickets and hopefully accept some donations.

We also have three dates lined up this autumn starting March 12th to sell Seafood Raffle tickets at the **Nelson Bay Bowling and Recreation club** on their regularly

scheduled Friday night raffles.

The **Sail Port Stephens 2021** event has been rescheduled for 19 – 25 of April. We will set up a promo booth on both the 18th and 19th during the sign up at *Broughtons at the Bay*, the official headquarters for the event.

We are also looking ahead to a rescheduling of the popular *Trailer Boat Fishing Tournament* for 2021, a very good opportunity to meet with the boating public we serve.

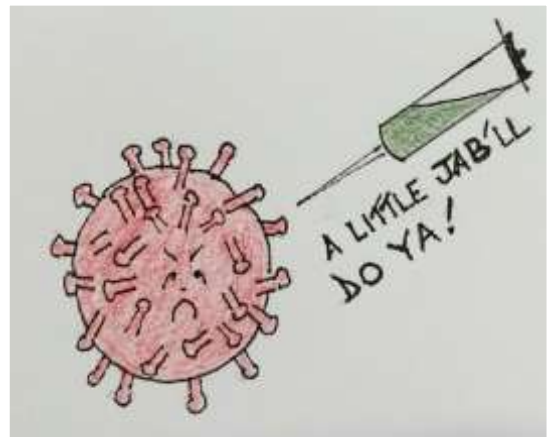
So in 2021 with the resumption of fundraising activities, the reopening of our gift shop, cottage and museum, we hope to get back to near normal relations with our community – with COVIDSafe practices firmly in place.

**Will Scott**

## GIFT SHOP

With the Covid outbreak in Sydney, the Gift Shop was unable to open for business from 21 December 2020 to 1 February 2021, thus causing considerable financial loss to Marine Rescue, as this period is our busiest time of year. All profit from the Gift Shop goes to fuel and maintenance expenses of our two rescue vessels. I thank all Gift Shop volunteers for the dedicated job they do in keeping this continuum in steady flow, without you, we would not have such a successful enterprise.....

**Sandra Scheuber**  
Manager



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## NELSON HEAD RESERVE

### NELSON HEAD RESERVE CHAIRMAN



The restrictions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic caused havoc for the operations at Nelson Head during December and January



Light Room in 1902

with the Tea Rooms and Cottage closed to visitors. Luckily things have changed and we are now back to normal operations in all venues.

We have developed new plans for the Museum with an emphasis on education particularly for school children in the Port Stephens area. We wish to concentrate our efforts on highlighting the maritime history of the area and

the effect of this on the development of industry in the Port. More information on this at a later date.

The redevelopment of the Light Room has taken much longer than anticipated due to lengthy delays in the manufacture of new lamps to indicate exactly how the Light Room originally operated. We are pressing the lamp makers very hard to get these lamps finished by the end of March so that we can reopen the Room to the public.

We are continuing to work on repairing the Bunker and have had a geotechnical engineer carry out a drilling assessment of the ground around the bunker so that we can determine how to arrest the slippage of the main building slab. The report is expected by the end of February and we will then determine the next course of action. The bunker is of great historical importance as it was an observation post and battery during WW11 and at a later date was the first permanent home of the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol.

At the beginning of February we were advised that we had been successful in a grant application to the Crown Reserve Improvement Fund for funds to carry out much needed maintenance to the buildings at Nelson Head. This work includes painting of all of the buildings, roof repairs and repairs to paths and paving around the site. This



work will commence in early March and will take five to six weeks to complete. So look out for a much brighter and safer site in the next month or so.

Tours and weddings have started again and we have a number of bookings over the next few months. It will be very pleasing to see the site being use again for these activities so that we can show off the wonderful site and views to more people.

Our ground maintenance crew have continued their good work during the holiday period and the lawns and gardens are looking a picture. These guys are the unsung heroes of our organisation and deserve much credit for the hard work they do keeping the lawns and gardens looking so good.

Look forward to seeing you soon at Nelson Head to enjoy the views and the amenities we can offer.

**John Reid**

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- More likely to have a stroke
- More likely to have a car accident
- More likely to have problems controlling your diabetes.

If you already have a Sleep Apnea machine, it is recommended  
that it be cleaned every 6 months.



## BOATS OFFICER

### BOATS OFFICER

Before Christmas we were given the sad news that our Boat Office, Barney Pinney, had passed away. A tribute to Barney is published in another section of this edition of Port Chatter however we want to say that Barney will be (and is every day) missed down at the dock. He was a guy of immense knowledge and energy, having an in-depth understanding how everything worked on our boats. Barney we miss you a lot



On February 7, PS31, PS30 and LT30 along with Port Stephens Water Police had the honour of assisting to scatter Barney's ashes in the waters he loved so much. Just

before PS31 departed the berth with Barney's family on board a Mayday call from beyond the port limits was received. PS30 was tasked. Barney would have been proud to see Marine Rescue Port



Stephens responding so quickly to a very serious situation.

The role of the Boat Officer and the Maintenance Crew is to ensure that when our rescue boats are tasked they are available. We are very pleased to report that we achieved our mission and the boats were available each time they were called to a rescue.

Since the start of December to Feb 24 our boats have been called upon 42 times. When tasked they

started as expected and completed their mission.

PS30 was damaged during one such mission and had to be lifted out of the water for repairs. As luck would have it the vessel was not tasked during the repairs so our record was not affected (statistics can be made to say whatever you want!).

Our ability to respond when required is due to our maintenance systems and especially to the fine work carried out by our maintenance crew (Bill, Ian, Rex, Bob, Robert and the other Ian). It is pleasing to see Trainee Crew joining us during our maintenance sessions and to the other crew members who come to help.

We are also very grateful to support companies in the Bay and these include Mark Sutherland at **Fleetguard** (who services the Yanmar Engines on PS31), **Bay Boat Sales** (who service the outboards on PS30 and who quickly helped us when PS30 was damaged) and **D'Albora Boat Yard** (Matt Bonser) who always do their best to help us if our boats have to be lifted out of the water.

Our vessels are commercially registered and must comply with the regulations as laid down by the National authority AMSA. In mid-March PS31 will be taken out of the water to be surveyed by a registered surveyor. Part of this work includes removing both propeller shafts for inspection – not an easy or cheap exercise. To keep the boats licensed the

inspection must be completed and the boats must meet the standard required to continue safely operating.



(Continued on page 19)



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## BOATS OFFICER... OPERATIONS OFFICER AND BUSY TIMES

(Continued from page 17)



In January, we took delivery of a new dock generator. It is now up and running supplying power to the operations and maintaining our boat batteries (flat batteries do not help our mission!).

This generator was kindly donated by the parents of the Helicopter Pilot (David Kerr) who was killed off the Stockton Coast when the helicopter crashed on the evening of 6



appreciate all those involved in fund raising and those generous people who support Marine Rescue Port Stephens in so many ways.

**Tony O'Donnell**



conditions looking for survivors of the crash.

So it all works and it all costs a lot of money keeping two vessels on the water. Our boats respond as required due to the work of so many people and companies. We are a large drain on the finances of this Unit and we genuinely

### ACTING OPERATIONS OFFICER

As I have only recently taken on the role, I have been on a steep learning curve, getting up to date with all the activities around the Unit. We have had a busy summer in all areas of our operations and would like to thank all of you for your hard work that enables us to operate our comms centre and rescue vessels



24 x 7. I have come to realise that there is a lot going on and I hope that I will get up to speed soon. I would like to express my thanks to Richard who has done a sterling job as OPSO for the last couple of years, his are big shoes to fill. I look forward to meeting more of you in the coming weeks and will be able to report more on our activities for the next Chatter.

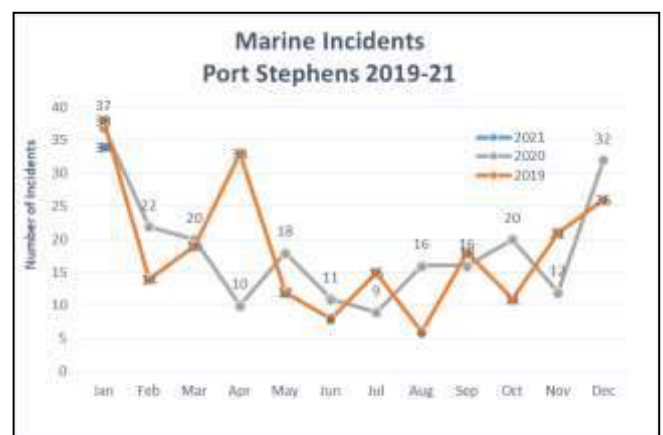
**Sue Freeman**

### BUSY TIMES

In the November newsletter, I highlighted the fact that MRNSW expected the holiday boating season to be much busier than usual as people chose to holiday closer to home. I don't know that anyone predicted quite the increase in activity we have experienced however. December 2020 was ridiculously busy, but then came January 2021. Now we all know December and January are historically busy months, but...who can recall a day quite like January 10, 2021. The Communications Centre handled around 90 log-ons that day, and the boats were both on the water for a large part of the day, with a trip to Seal Rocks and two to Broughton Island. More on this later, but you get the point.

The monthly statistics paint much the same picture. I've included the stats for 2019 to round out the numbers, but you can see that December 2020 was a much busier month in terms of incidents than November 2020 (32 compared to 12). Comparing December 2020 to previous

Decembers, 2020 is busier than 2019 (26) but only on par with 2018 (33). The month of January is however a different story. My statistics are current through to 22 January inclusive, with 34 incidents in 2021 compared to 37 or 38 for the whole of January in the preceding two



(Continued on page 20)

## BUSY TIMES CONT...

(Continued from page 19)

years. A pretty close contest you might think, but then we got hit with Saturday, January 23.

We were one of the busiest MRNSW units in the state on this day, handling 10 of 60 marine incidents state-wide.

The day started with an assist for PS31, Skipper Laurie and crew, off Cabbage Tree Island at around 7 am. This early start worked in well with Mick Duggan's (photo right



and below) Operational Assessment (OA) for Coxswain, also on PS31. PS30 had been off the water for a week or so, and the good folks at LTP had made their vessel, LT30,

available to serve as a distressed vessel (DV) for Mick's OA. That is, until they were tasked for an operation.

As luck would have it, PS30 had been made serviceable that very morning, largely through the surreptitious charms of Tony O'Donnell and the call now went out to scramble her for Mick's OA.

As the OA was entering its final stage however, PS31 was waved down by a vessel in Shoal Bay in need of assistance. They were safe at anchor and agreed to wait a few minutes to allow Mick to complete the OA.

As Mick nudged PS30 into the public wharf to complete his OA, a call from the Base alerted PS30 to another job, this time involving a jet ski. Both jobs were wrapped up uneventfully, but more was still to come.

LT30 was on the water responding to a routine job when she was retasked to assist a large cruiser requiring more urgent help. The vessel had sustained significant damage to her prop seal and was now tied up at the Tea Gardens public wharf and in danger of sinking. LT30 was on scene smartly and succeeding in keeping the vessel afloat by pumping her out.

As this little drama was wrapping up, PS30 was responding to yet another task. A small tinnie, the tower, was towing a disabled jet ski – the towee – in the Myall River when said tower broke down. The tower, now also in need of a tow and therefore a towee, plus the original towee, presented something of a challenge, right up until LT30 arrived on scene to assist, having just left the scene of the no-longer sinking cruiser. Alas, LT30 towed Towee Number 2 – the tinnie – back to safety whilst PS30 took charge of Towee Number 1 – the jetski – and proceeded

to Salamander. PS30 finally signed off at 9:30 pm, marking the end of a fourteen and a half hour day for Duty Skipper Laurie. I take my hat off to him; to the Communications Centre team who handled an extraordinary volume of radio and telephone traffic throughout the day; and to Neil Fraser, our unflappable DCO on the day in question.

We're looking at running some refresher sessions in the March timeframe for Communication Centre staff. The sessions will cover various topics, such as the Seahawk Incident Management system, proposed changes to the way we present and store operational information, and local operating procedures. More to come on this closer to the time. Spots will be limited per course (as per COVID-19 requirements) but we plan on running enough courses to accommodate all comers.

### It Matters

As a boat crew member serving on the Unit's Rescue Vessels (RVs), I get to experience first-hand the impact of what we do on those we help. The vast majority of our jobs are, it's fair to say, routine, even mundane NRMA-type affairs – no fuel, no battery charge, engine playing up etc – and you could be forgiven for thinking the response from those we assist might be similarly 'mundane'. It's important to remember however that we – the members of MRNSW – deal with marine incidents every day. That's not the same for those on the other end of the assist. Their 'mundane' assist is likely to be a very rare event for them and therefore not very mundane at all.

Then of course there are the real emergencies; like the one we responded to in the early morning of 18 January 2021. The Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) in Canberra had picked up an EPIRB signal emanating just off Little Broughton Island, and had relayed the information to the MAC. The MAC in turn notified MRPS and a crew for PS31 was hurriedly assembled by the DCO. As these events were unfolding meanwhile, a couple of lads heading out for a day's fishing in their vessel *Black Ops* were surprised to see what they thought was a red flare just off to their left, and even more surprised seconds later to come across the source of that flare – a group of four men in the water clinging to two large white eskies and a red **Life Cell**. Unaware of this information as yet, the MAC had also tasked a rescue helicopter to the area. The crew of *Black Ops* had wasted no time in retrieving the four men and their kit and raced them to shore at Esmerelda Cove, Broughton Island. Word of the rescue had filtered up through the rescue chain and PS31 was now tasked to recover the four men from Broughton. *Black Ops* meanwhile having saved four lives before breakfast, departed from Esmerelda as quickly as she had arrived, still intent on catching fish.

The rescue chopper duly arrived and landed at

(Continued on page 21)

## BUSY TIMES CONT..

(Continued from page 20)

Broughton, giving the four rescued men a thorough medical going over before declaring them none the worse for their adventure. The chopper departed just before PS31 motored into Esmeralda. A couple of shuttle trips later and the four men and their kit were safely on board and ready to head home.



The four men safe and sound back at Nelson Bay

As told by the men, they had been preparing to spear fish just off Little Broughton Island when their vessel suddenly started taking on water over the transom. They had motored forward but the flooding was too severe and the boat rapidly sank in 28 metres of water. The men had the presence of mind to don lifejackets and grab their life cell, a fluorescent red waterproof case which contained an EPIRB and five flares. They had activated their EPIRB on entering the water and this had drawn an immediate response from the RCC. At the same time, they had fired flares in the direction of various vessels, none of which had seen the flares. They had fired their fifth and final flare at another vessel, and this time they were relieved to see the vessel – *Black Ops* – change course and approach them. They had been in the water for 45 minutes.

These men were no doubt lucky, but they were also well-prepared. They had lifejackets and the life cell, with an EPIRB and flares. They also knew how to use them. It was interesting talking to these four men as we motored home. They were appreciative of all the effort people had gone to. It mattered to them.

### Sunday, Busy Sunday

I've already mentioned Saturday, 23 January 2021 as being one of if not the busiest days ever for MRPS. If however I was to consider nautical miles travelled by our rescue boats as the metric for determining how busy we were, then Sunday 10 January 2021 would have to rate very highly.

The day started with a trip to Seal Rocks for PS31, with Sue as skipper. There's 60 nm return. Sue and her crew had been back at the berth for just three minutes when another task came in, this time to the north east of Broughton Island. Sue stayed on as skipper with Ray, but the rest of the crew was relieved.

Next, something very uncommon (thankfully) happened. Some of you might know that when the Communications Centre's landline capacity (three lines) is exceeded, subsequent phone calls are diverted to the Operations Officer's mobile. Imagine my surprise then when I'm walking to my car near Harvey Norman's and I answer my phone to hear:

'Yeh, g'day mate. I'm up here at Broughton and I've got a bit of a problem with me boat and I think I might need some help!...'

It takes me a full ten seconds to realise what's happened, and then I can't find a pen to take down the details, so I try and commit them to memory!

I finally succeed in getting through to the Communications Centre and

relay the details of this latest assist. I know PS31 has



already been retasked and that the Duty Skipper is on this vessel. I ring Sue and confirm with her the conditions outside and she agrees that they're suitable for PS30 to do a run to Broughton. Now all we need is a Skipper and crew. I consult with the DCO and eventually we call upon Laurie as skipper. Not

ideal, because Laurie is also the night Watch Officer tonight. But I really need a skipper. Frank is the On-call Watch Officer, and agrees to cover the first hour or two of Laurie's shift, thus freeing him to skipper PS30 to Broughton.

That's another 25nm for PS31, and 20nm for PS30. Making a total for the day of 105nm. Not a bad tally for one day.

...and with that, I'm OUT...

**Richard Pizzuto**



**Phone: 4984 1244**  
**Fax: 4981 1468**

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*Currently there is no Courtesy Bus available*



## Club Bingo and Trivia nights

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## TRIBUTE TO A LOST HELICOPTER PILOT AND A SON

### Tribute to a Lost Helicopter Pilot and a Son

On Friday evening September 6, 2019 PS31 was tasked to search the waters off Stockton Bight for a reported lost helicopter with 5 people on-board. A storm had



David Kerr where he liked to be (above) and the Huey which David rebuilt from scratch. It had once been in service and David often flew Vietnam Vets in it.

recently passed through the area making sea state conditions extremely rough. The Westpac Rescue Helicopter was first on scene with their crew guiding PS31



to the sighting of some wreckage. Water Police vessel (WP24) was next on scene with both vessels continuing to search the area for survivors. The conditions were treacherous. Sadly, the search was unsuccessful.

PS31 remained searching for a long time (with deck crew using safety lines) until our Skipper and crew agreed it was too dangerous to stay out to sea. On the return journey, twice our vessel was compromised with confused seas. We were thankful to the skill of our Skipper Laurie and the quality of the Steber 38 that we made it safely back to port.

The Pilot of the lost Huey helicopter, was David Kerr. He was an experienced helicopter pilot and a former member of the Royal Australian Navy (10 years). His parents visited Marine Rescue Port Stephens sometime after the tragedy to thank our crew for their efforts on that night and to offer to make a donation to the Unit.

It was agreed after researching several project alternatives that a generator for our dock would be purchased and dedicated to the memory of David and his friends who were on-board that night. Our dock does not have a connected power source. This generator will automatically back-up the solar/battery system to ensure that we always have power on the dock and that our boat batteries are always charged. Guaranteed engine start is

the goal for incidents such as that of 6/9/2019.

On Tuesday 1 March David Kerr's parents (Lorraine and David) formally handed over the generator to Unit



The crew today and also back in 2019. Brian, Laurie (Skipper) Tony, Ian, Richard in the insert

Commander Ben Van Der Wijngaart. Ben gratefully accepted this very generous donation on behalf of the Unit. The generator has been dedicated to the memory of David Kerr and security lighting can now be switched on every



Formal hand over of the keys to the generator. A sad occasion which brings back memories

night. Following the handover, Lorraine and David were taken out on PS31 to the scene of the tragedy. The crew of 2/9/2019 were proud to serve on the boat again today.

**Footnote:** The Generator is now called "Nelson" after David's dog which he loved so much. Nelson was named after Horatio Nelson the famous English Admiral.

**Tony O'Donnell**



**TerryWhite  
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## THE SHIFTING SANDS OF PORT STEPHENS - PART 2

### THE SHIFTING SANDS OF PORT STEPHENS – PART TWO

In Part One of this article, I described the origins and distribution of the flood tide delta that makes up most of the shallower areas of the eastern part of Port Stephens. This is a dynamic sedimentary unit whose continual evolution is intimately linked to the ongoing redistribution of sand around our foreshores. In this second part, I will look at the processes that drive sediment movements within Port Stephens and what the climate change affected future may hold.

Long term change to the extent and geomorphology to the flood tide delta causes ongoing change to wave refraction and current patterns. These changes affect patterns of erosion and deposition within Port Stephens. The main naturally occurring physical processes that cause sand movement within Port Stephens are waves, tides, currents, winds and storms. Estuarine ecology also plays a role. Interference to these processes is caused by anthropogenic actions such as construction of marinas, breakwaters, seawalls, jetties, groynes and oyster racks, and activities such as boating wakes, dredging, land clearing, shoreline reclamation and removal of coastal dunes and tree lines. These changes can significantly influence the natural variability and/or resilience of an estuarine system to withstand threats or pressures.

#### The role of wave action

The most important natural sediment transport process is wave action which has two key components; ocean swells that enter Port Stephens and are refracted around the headlands before impacting shorelines, and locally generated wind waves, with the largest waves coming from the west and north-west. While swell wave heights of over 3.0m can be expected in the immediate entrance of Port Stephens, inside the port they are generally less than 0.5m.

Ocean swells enter the port through the heads and are refracted by friction from the shallowing seabed and the adjacent headlands before approaching the beaches to the north and south at an acute angle. This is the optimal condition for the generation of nearshore currents. Swell waves impacting the shoreline stir up the sediment and their angular moment generates a current which transports the suspended sediment to the west. These locally generated currents may persist for a week or more at a time. Waves approaching parallel to the beach do not generate these currents. Users of Shoal Bay beach will be familiar with the hummocked appearance of the sand that builds up along the western end of the beach following a period of heavy onshore swell. In contrast to the action of swell waves, locally generated wind waves are

generally of shorter duration and have much less impact. While they may cause short-term local erosion, they do not tend to produce extensive sediment transport as produced by swell waves.

The image below shows incoming ocean swell refracted to the northwest and southeast as it enters Port Stephens heads. The narrow eroded eastern and central sections, and the widened western end of Shoal Bay beach are prominent, as are extensive areas of seagrass in Shoal Bay and off Jimmy's Beach.



#### The role of coastal dunes and shoreline vegetation

Once sand has been deposited on the shoreline by wave action and dries, it is subject to aeolian transport. Winds of 10 km/hr or greater move sediment from the beach

face to the back beach area via surface creep, saltation or suspension. When winds transporting sediment encounter a foredune they are deflected upwards and gravity causes transported sand to be deposited at the dune face. The



*(Continued on page 26)*

## THE SHIFTING SANDS OF PORT STEPHENS....

*(Continued from page 25)*

presence of vegetation such as spinifex grass, help trap the sand grains. The presence of a tree line adjacent to the shore will have a similar effect as a dune. The natural build-up of sand in coastal dunes and their associated vegetation helps to stabilise the adjacent beach and minimise erosion. By removing coastal sand dunes and shore line vegetation, the erosion processes are accelerated. This can be attested by anyone who has visited the Little Beach boat ramp during or after a strong westerly blow. Hundreds of cubic metres of sand are blown onto the ramp and car park where there is no natural shoreline barrier. By contrast, the section of beach immediately to the north of the ramp, where the tree line is intact, is less affected.

### **The role of seagrass**

Port Stephens has the second most extensive seagrass beds in NSW, covering over 1000ha with four species of



seagrass. Seagrass beds play an important part in estuaries as they enhance biodiversity, stabilize sediment and provide critical habitat as nursery, feeding and shelter areas for many aquatic animals. They are also important in maintaining water quality by adsorbing nutrients. Seagrass is present throughout Shoal Bay, with extensive offshore areas around Jimmy's Beach, Winda Woppa, Corrie Island and Pindimar Bay. It extends along the southern bay shoreline west to Soldiers Point, and along the northern bay shoreline to the west of Pig Station Creek.

Seagrass stabilises bottom sediments in areas where it is present and limits transport of sand onto adjacent beaches. It is not present in near shore areas subject to wave turbulence. Beaches with nearshore, healthy seagrass are not continually nourished by wave born sediment. Sediment disturbance and transport is limited to the littoral foreshore zone where it is subject to continuous wave turbulence.

### **The role of climate change**

Port Stephens is a tide-dominated estuary. The key drivers that are likely to influence the estuary as a result of climate change are sea level rise, rainfall, surface heat budget, wind and ocean acidification. The variables for

each of these drivers are hydrodynamic and mixing processes resulting from periodic tidal movements, geomorphological processes which distribute sediment, and water quality processes resulting from catchment runoff and biological activity. When assessing the impact of these drivers, the highest level of vulnerability is for estuarine sediments and geomorphology associated with sea level rise. Moderate vulnerability is assessed for estuarine hydrodynamic and mixing processes and for water quality interactions associated with sea level rise, and for hydrodynamic and mixing processes associated with wind action. Estuarine vulnerability for the other drivers is assessed as low.

### **Sea level rise**

Sea level rise is caused primarily by two factors related to global warming: the added water from melting ice sheets and glaciers and the expansion of seawater as it warms. Predictions for sea level rise to the end of this century vary from tens of cm to 2 m. Records of sea level change at Sydney show that relative sea level has risen  $1.38 \pm 0.18$  mm per year between 1897 and 1998. The Port Stephens Council is basing its planning on a rise of 0.91 m by the end of the century.

Estuaries are particularly vulnerable to sea level rise as many are surrounded by extensive areas of coastal wetlands, flood plains and other low lying areas. Sea level rise will eventually inundate these low lying areas and the area of the estuary will increase. The increase in area and increasing depth of water will combine to produce a greater volume of water within Port Stephens which has over 30% of its LGA covered by wetlands. The resulting tidal prism will also be greater and the velocity of tidal flows will increase to accommodate the increased tidal volume.

The impact of sea level rise on sediments movement within the port are numerous and they include the following: inundation of low lying areas, increased shoreline erosion, changes to seagrass distribution, altered estuarine tidal range and circulation patterns, and altered sediment transport regimes.

### **Changing wind patterns**

One aspect of climate change will already be evident to long term Port Stephens residents with memories of much colder and more frequent episodes of westerly winds in the past. These anecdotal recollections are born-out by weather observations. The Southern Annular Mode (SAM) is a lesser-known climate driver that can have substantial short-term impacts on southern Australia's climate. It is a belt of low pressure with strong associated westerly winds that surrounds Antarctica. When it is in a negative phase, it produces storms and cold fronts that move from west to east across southern Australia. When in a positive phase, the westerly winds move to the south allowing increased airflow from the east. The extent of the impact of SAM on the weather varies from summer to winter but the overall effect is increased dry air flow from

*(Continued on page 27)*

## THE SHIFTING SANDS OF PORT STEPHENS....

(Continued from page 26)

the interior when it is in a negative phase, and increased moist, onshore air flow when in a positive phase. Most positive or negative SAM events last for around 10 days to two weeks, however, the summer bushfire of 2018-

2019 were accompanied by a persistent negative SAM that lasted for around two months. Since the



early 1980s, the seasonal SAM index has displayed more positive phases than negative, indicating that onshore airflow from the east has been more prevalent than westerly airflow.

With increasing periods of onshore airflow, it can be expected that there will be increased periods of easterly swell generated offshore and entering the port. Other effects of changing wind patterns within the estuary are changes in hydrodynamic flows and littoral sediment transport, increased shoreline erosion from nearshore currents, changes to aeolian sand movement and altered circulation and mixing of waters.

### Future extreme events

Analysis of climate models by the Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO predicts that the average future rainfall in southern Australia will decrease compared with the climate of 1980-1999. Despite this, the frequency and intensity of extreme daily rainfall is projected to increase. Modelling also projects a decrease to the number of small to moderate east coast lows in the cooler season with little change in these storms during the warm season. However extreme east coast lows in the warmer months may increase in number, while extreme east coast lows in cool seasons may not change. The recent intense east coast lows of June 2007, April 2015 and January 2016 may be the precursors to more frequent events such as the 1927 gale that destroyed the Myall Spit. These extreme events have the potential for significant impact on the physical states of estuarine geomorphology and



associated shoreline erosion.

### Future sand movements in Port Stephens

Despite the best intentions and remediation expenditure of our councils and governments, the problems with erosion and undesirable sediment transport in Port Stephens will continue, probably at an increased rate. With an increased preponderance of onshore winds from the east, ocean generated swell will continue to erode beaches on both sides of the bay at a greater rate than previously. Natural process will continue to move sand away from areas where we prefer it to stay to areas where it causes problems. The impact of sea-level rise, even by only a few cm, will also contribute to increased rates of foreshore erosion.

The extensive seagrass beds in Shoal Bay will continue to limit natural nourishment of the beach and west flowing longshore currents generated by the incoming easterly swell will continue to move sand to the western end. Port Stephens Council developed a Shoal Bay Management Plan in 2001 which recommended regular beach renourishment by trucking 2500 cubic meters of sand from the western end of the beach to the eastern end, twice yearly. This has only been implemented when slugs of built up sand from the western end of the beach have impacted the sponge gardens at Fly Point.

In a similar manner, the erosion of the beach at Sandy Point will continue as sediment is moved by longshore currents to the west where it is deposited at the western drop off of the flood tide delta. The western face of the delta is moving west at a rate of approximately one metre per year.

Seagrass beds also limit natural nourishment of Jimmy's Beach and longshore currents generated by the easterly swell continue to move increasing amounts of sediment to the west. While the \$6 million sand reclamation and pumping facility at Winda Woppa will be able renourish the adjacent beaches on a regular basis for the short



term, it is only a temporary measure, and eventually property owners on The Boulevard will have to accept the inevitable.

**Neil Fraser**

## RFS LIAISON

Marine Rescue Port Stephens takes over the communications role for Lower Hunter and Hunter Valley RFS nightly. From around 4.00pm until 9.00am the following morning all 000 fire calls for the region are

directed to the MRPS Watchkeeper who pages and maintains radio and phone communications with RFS units, duty personnel and Fire and Rescue.

### HUNTER VALLEY RFS

While summer 2020/21 was no way near as devastating as 2019/20, the brigades were still available 24/7 for callouts to fires and motor vehicle accidents. Therefore MRPS was again the overnight Firecom for this entire period.

Mangoola RFB was called to a different kind of assist at Denman. Together with Fire & Rescue 283, SES, Scone equine vet and Muswellbrook Shire Council, the pony was able to be re-united with the herd, none the worse for wear.

Of a more human nature, a Motor Vehicle Accident (MVA) with people trapped was more usual fare for the Edinglassie crew on Thomas Mitchell Drive. Called out at 1830, they were finally back in station at 0430 the next day.



Donations to help train the RFS volunteers come from many community minded organisations.

CDC NSW donated two former school buses and O'Neill's Heavy Towing and Salvage delivered them to the Bulga training site.

The buses will be used in training scenarios for the District's Rescue and Medical First Responders crews.

*Colin Couper*

**Prepare Act Survive**

Month		Bush	Structure	CFR	MVA	Car	AFA	Other	Total
Nov-20	HVRFS	3	2	2	1	2	0	3	13
Dec-20	HVRFS	3	4	2	3	3	2	6	23
Jan-21	HVRFS	8	1	2	2	3	0	1	17
Nov-20	LHRFS	15	0	15	16	24	2	17	89
Dec-20	LHRFS	12	3	15	10	6	7	27	80
Jan-21	LHRFS	12	3	13	8	15	12	22	85
<b>Total for Nov-Jan</b>		<b>53</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>307</b>

### LOWER HUNTER RFS LIAISON

As can be seen on the table above we average about 85 incidents a month. A very busy time for our over night watch officers.

#### GIFT OF SEVEN CAT 13 TO FIRE FIGHTING SERVICES BY THE UAE GOVERNMENT.

NBN news aired an item on 22 February, that the UAE Government had gifted three brand new Cat 13 appliances to volunteer brigades in Australia. Cat. 13 appliances are bulk water carriers, which can carry 11,000 litres of water, and are very useful in areas where there is no permanent water supply, as in



Australia and the ACT. Three are destined for NSW..

*Ross Debenham*

the middle of a vast National Park. The unit is based on a 6x4 Single Cab Isuzu FVZ 1400 Medium Cab Chassis. These trucks cost 3.4 million dollars and were built at the Varley Group workshop in Tomago. The appliances will go to brigades in NSW, Victoria, Western



## BIRDS AROUND PORT STEPHENS

### BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*LIMOSA LAPPONICA*)

The Bar-tailed Godwit is a bird that few residents of Port Stephens would be aware of or have seen in the bay. Port Stephens and the Hunter estuary is the most important site in NSW for these birds and around 4,000 are resident during summer. Boaties using the western part of Port Stephens will have seen them roosting at high tide on the top of oyster lease poles or on some of the isolated beaches or rocky headlands.

The Bar-tailed Godwit is a large wader with a bill-to-tail length 37–41 cm, wingspan 70–80 cm and weighs on average 285 gm. Females are slightly larger than males. In its non-breeding plumage, the Bar-tailed Godwit is mainly mottled grey-brown above and lighter and more uniform buff below. It has dull white underwings, and a distinctive, long, slightly upturned bill that is pink with a black tip. As the name suggests, the white tail is barred with brown. In its breeding plumage the neck, breast and belly are all a bright rufous red. Young birds resemble non-breeding birds.

The Bar-tailed Godwit forages by probing along shorelines, estuarine mudflats and wetlands where they eat molluscs, worms, insects, other invertebrates and some aquatic plants. Clusters of vibration-sensitive mechanoreceptors are located within pits in the bird's bill-tip and allow detection of buried or submerged prey via substrate-borne vibrations and/or interstitial pressure gradients.

The Bar-tailed Godwit is a migratory shorebird that spends its life in perpetual summer. It breeds in summer on Arctic coasts and tundra in the Northern Hemisphere then migrates south along the East Pacific Flyway to spend summer in tropical and temperate coastal regions in the Southern Hemisphere. Its migration is the longest known non-stop flight of any bird and also the longest journey without pausing to feed by any animal.

Birds arrive in Australia and New Zealand from mid-August. In Eastern Australia they settle on mud flats and estuaries along the coast from North Queensland to Tasmania. They are social birds and are often present in large numbers. In annual surveys of Port Stephens up to 888 birds have been recorded in summer and 424 in winter. Immature birds over-winter in Australia during their first year. Birds of breeding age begin to colour up in March and depart Australia from late March to early May.

Before departure and at stopovers, Bar-tailed Godwits go into a feeding frenzy, putting on weight at a great rate. Body weight can increase by 60–70% to more than 400 gm prior to departure and by the time they leave 55% of their body mass is fat. Fat is light and yields about eight times as much energy per gram as protein



(muscle). Many birds also grow bigger flight muscles with the help of natural steroids, so they have extra power for the flight. Some weight is also saved by shrinkage of organs not needed on the flight, such as the gut, liver and kidneys.

On arrival at their breeding grounds in the Arctic the birds build a simple nest on the ground. It is usually a shallow cup of moss lined with vegetation. Two to five olive-green eggs are laid in early May and are incubated for 21 days. Young are cared for at the nest for around 28 days before fledging in early July. Both sexes share incubation of the eggs and care for the young.

Consider the amazing feat of E7, a bird captured, tagged and fitted with a satellite tracking device at Miranda on the North Island of New Zealand, in 2007. On 17 March 2007 the bird flew northwest non-stop for 11,026 km, arriving at the Yellow Sea, China on 24 March. Here the bird fed and rested before departing on 1 May and flying non-stop for a further 7,200 km to western Alaska,

arriving on 5 May. After going through its annual breeding cycle, E7 departed Alaska and flew south on 30 August, flying non-stop 11,680 km across the eastern Pacific Ocean to Miranda, New Zealand, arriving on 7 September. Its average speed for the journey was 63 km/h. The commercial aircraft that can fly this distance non-stop has not yet been built. Total distance covered during the migration cycle was around 30,000 km. For more details of the

amazing feat of E7 check this website. <http://globalflywaynetwork.com.au/our-work/satellite-tracking/>

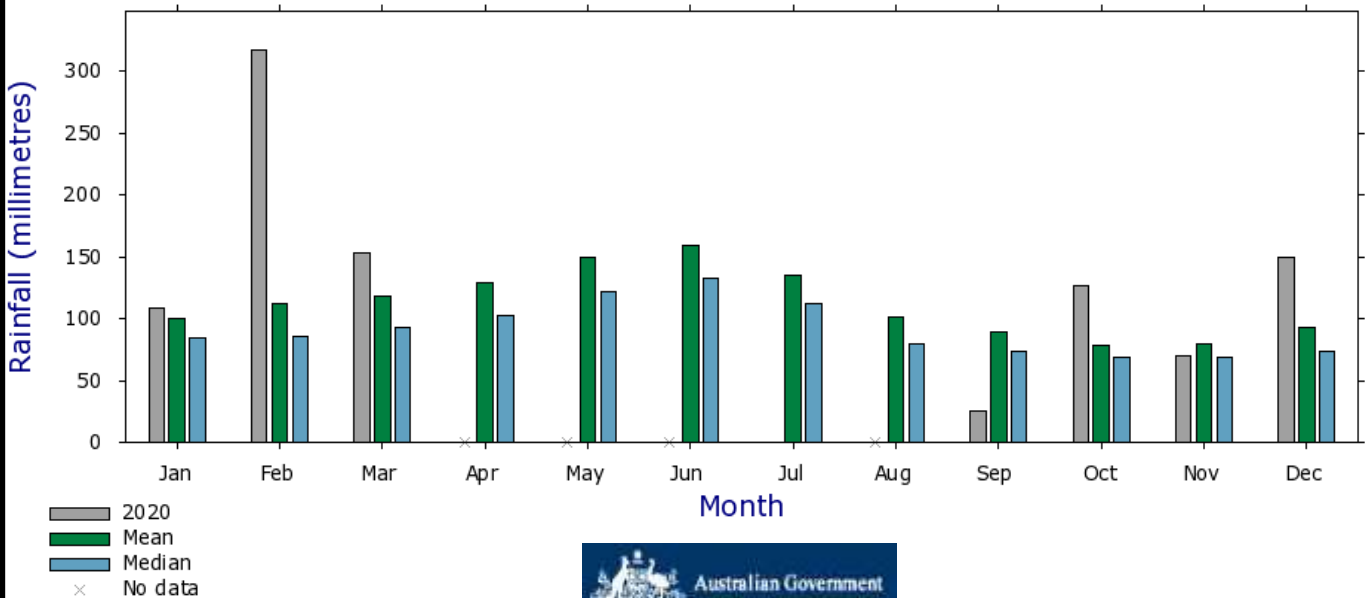
Unfortunately, Bar-tailed Godwits are in trouble. Their numbers appear to have declined by 30-50% over the past 30 years and are continuing to decline. The main reason appears to be reclamation of shoreline around the Yellow Sea for industry and agriculture. Damming of the Yangtze River has stopped transport of large amounts of silt into the Yellow Sea. Over 50% of the shoreline has been reclaimed since 1950. 80% of Bar-tailed Godwits migrating north along the West Pacific Flyway are thought to use the Yellow Sea shoreline for foraging. Some coastal habitat around estuaries in Australia has also been lost. Climate change is thought to be having an effect although the extent is not known at this time. The Bar-tailed Godwit is listed as Vulnerable in Australia. To see an excellent video on the threats to these birds and efforts to save them, visit the following website of the Fuller Laboratory at the University of Queensland. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8ByuyYxgSk>

**Neil Fraser**  
**Twitther**

# PORT STEPHENS WEATHER

Nelson Bay, NSW - January 2021					Nelson Bay, NSW - February 2021				
Date	Day	Temps		Rain	Date	Day	Temps		Rain
		Min	Max				Min	Max	
		°C	°C	mm			°C	°C	mm
1	Fr	19.1	22.2	2	1	Mo	18.5	27.4	1.5
2	Sa	18	23.5	0	2	Tu		23.5	3.4
3	Su	19	24	2.6	3	We	19	24.5	2.4
4	Mo	15.5	27.5	0.4	4	Th	19	27.8	0
5	Tu	18	29.5	21.2	5	Fr	19	26.3	0
6	We	20.4	24.6	0.8	6	Sa	18.9	25.2	0
7	Th	19	25	0	7	Su	20.8	27.3	8.8
8	Fr	16.9	24.5	13.6	8	Mo	20.3	25	1.7
9	Sa	16	24.9	12.8	9	Tu	18.5	26	1.6
10	Su	17.5	26.9	2.2	10	We	16.3	24	5.3
11	Mo	18.6	27.8	0	11	Th	15.5	26	0.9
12	Tu	18.8	28.1	0	12	Fr	17.4	27.6	0
13	We	18.2	28.5	0	13	Sa	20.6	24.2	4.2
14	Th	20	27.5	0	14	Su	17.8	23.1	15.2
15	Fr	17.9	28	0	15	Mo	18	22.7	12.1
16	Sa	18.5	24.7	0	16	Tu	18.2	26	11.2
17	Su	16.9	27	0	17	We	18.3	25	0.6
18	Mo	19.1	28.4	0	18	Th	18.3	26.8	3.6
19	Tu	20.6	25.2	0.1	19	Fr	19.1	28.6	19
20	We	18.1	23.5	5.1	20	Sa	21	28.4	15
21	Th	16.8	27	0	21	Su	21.5	24	10.4
22	Fr	19.5	27.8	0	22	Mo	21	28	4.2
23	Sa	19.8	29.5	0	23	Tu	20	22.5	9.6
24	Su		29.2	0	24	We	18.1	23.8	4
25	Mo	19.4	27.7	0	25	Th	18.2	26	0.1
26	Tu	19.2	30.4	0	26	Fr	20	27.6	0.2
27	We	19.7	22.9	0	27	Sa	21.1	23.5	0
28	Th	20.8	23	2	28	Su	20.9	27.6	1
29	Fr	20	23.5	14.8					
30	Sa	20	26.3	10					
31	Su	19.9	27	3.8					
Statistics for January 2021					Statistics for February 2021				
Mean		18.7	26.3		Mean		18.9	25.6	
Lowest		15.5	22.2	0	Lowest		15.5	22.5	0
Highest		20.8	30.4	21.2	Highest		21.5	28.6	19
Total				91.4	Total				136

Nelson Bay (Nelson Head) (061054) 2020 Rainfall (millimetres)



Note: Data may not have completed quality control



Climate Data Online, Bureau of Meteorology  
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# MARINE RESCUE PORT STEPHENS

*“Volunteers doing our jobs professionally”*



## **Our service to Port Stephens 2005-2020**

People saved/ assisted	6,300
Rescues and assists	2,718
Rescue Crew volunteer hours	62,658+
Radio Base volunteer hours	311,787+
Radio calls made/received	316,695
Telephone calls made/received	300,431

**Every day, Marine Rescue Port Stephens Members give more than 60 volunteer hours to serve our community**

**Volunteers saving lives on the water**

## MARINE RESCUE NSW PORT STEPHENS RESCUE VESSELS CURRENTLY IN SERVICE

The unit currently has two purpose built, specialised rescue vessels, crewed by motivated and trained volunteers who can be called upon at anytime, day or night, to head to the assistance of those who call.

A response time of 20 mins or less is estimated from alert to heading to sea. Our vessels boast a comprehensive inventory of the latest navigation, communication, safety and rescue technologies on board.

### PORT STEPHENS RESCUE VESSEL *PORT STEPHENS 31* *JOHN THOMPSON*



#### Specifications

Make / Model:	Steber International 38' - Category 3 SAR Vessel
Length:	11.46m (38ft)
Beam:	3.84m (12.6ft)
Displacement:	11.6 tonne
Draft:	1m
Fuel:	1350L
Engines:	Twin 420hp Yanmar diesel
Top Speed:	30kn
Crew:	Operational - normally 4
VHF:	Sailor 6222
Radar:	Raymarine Q24C Doppler
MFD's (Multifunction Display):	Raymarine Axiom 9 and 5 x Raymarine Axiom Pro 12 Hybrid Touch
AIS:	Raymarine AIS950
RDF:	Taiyo
27Mhz:	GME GX400B
DCN:	Tait TM9300

**Rescue Vessel Port Stephens 31 John Thompson** was built by Steber International, Taree, NSW and completed in May 2016. Her single hull is made of glass-reinforced plastic.

**Port Stephens 31** is fitted with state-of-the-art radar, direction finding and navigation equipment as well as forward looking infra red search equipment.

**John Thompson** has been prepared to Marine Rescue NSW specifications with minor customisation at the request of Port Stephens Unit and is capable of covering Port Stephens and anywhere along the coast for example Broughton Island, Seal Rocks and 30nm out to sea or further if tasked by MACSAR.



**PORT STEPHENS RESCUE VESSEL *PORT STEPHENS 30*  
*CODI-K II***



**Specifications:**

Make / Model:	Gemini WR-850
Type:	Rigid-Hull Inflatable (RHIB)
Length:	8.5m
Beam:	2.8m
Engines: -	2 x Suzuki four-stroke Outboards 200hp each (150kW)
Fuel Capacity:	2 x 200 litre tanks
Fuel Consumption:	Cruising speed - 50 litres / hour
Displacement:	3.2 tonnes
Survey:	2C
Crew:	4 operational
Speed:	Top speed around 40 knots. Cruising speed 25 to 30 knots.

**Rescue Vessel *Port Stephens 30 Codi-K II*** was manufactured in South Africa, prepared by Britton Marine of Taren Point NSW, and completed in February 2012. Her single hull is made of glass-reinforced plastic with alloy longitudinal keel reinforcement and her cabin is glass-reinforced plastic. She boasts among her electronic equipment a Raymarine Radar/Plotter, Furuno AIS Class-A and FLIR Thermal Night Vision System.

***Codi-K II*** has been prepared to Port Stephens Unit specifications in consultation with Marine Rescue NSW, and is capable of covering all of the areas of Port Stephens; ie, the Myall River system, Karuah River, and the other shallow areas of our waterways, as well as outside waters as required.

## IN APPRECIATION....



### Contributors to this issue of *Port Chatter*:

Iain Blackadder, Colin Couper, Ross Debenham, Neil Fraser, Sue Freeman, Tony O'Donnell John Reid, Will Scott, Ben van der Wijngaart. Other photos by Stephen Alta, Colin Couper, Ross Debenham, Penelope Highland, Tony O'Donnell,. You too can become a contributor and you will be most welcome. See inside front cover.

**Distributors of the *Port Chatter*:** This Monthly newsletter does not arrive in your letter-box via the tooth fairy.

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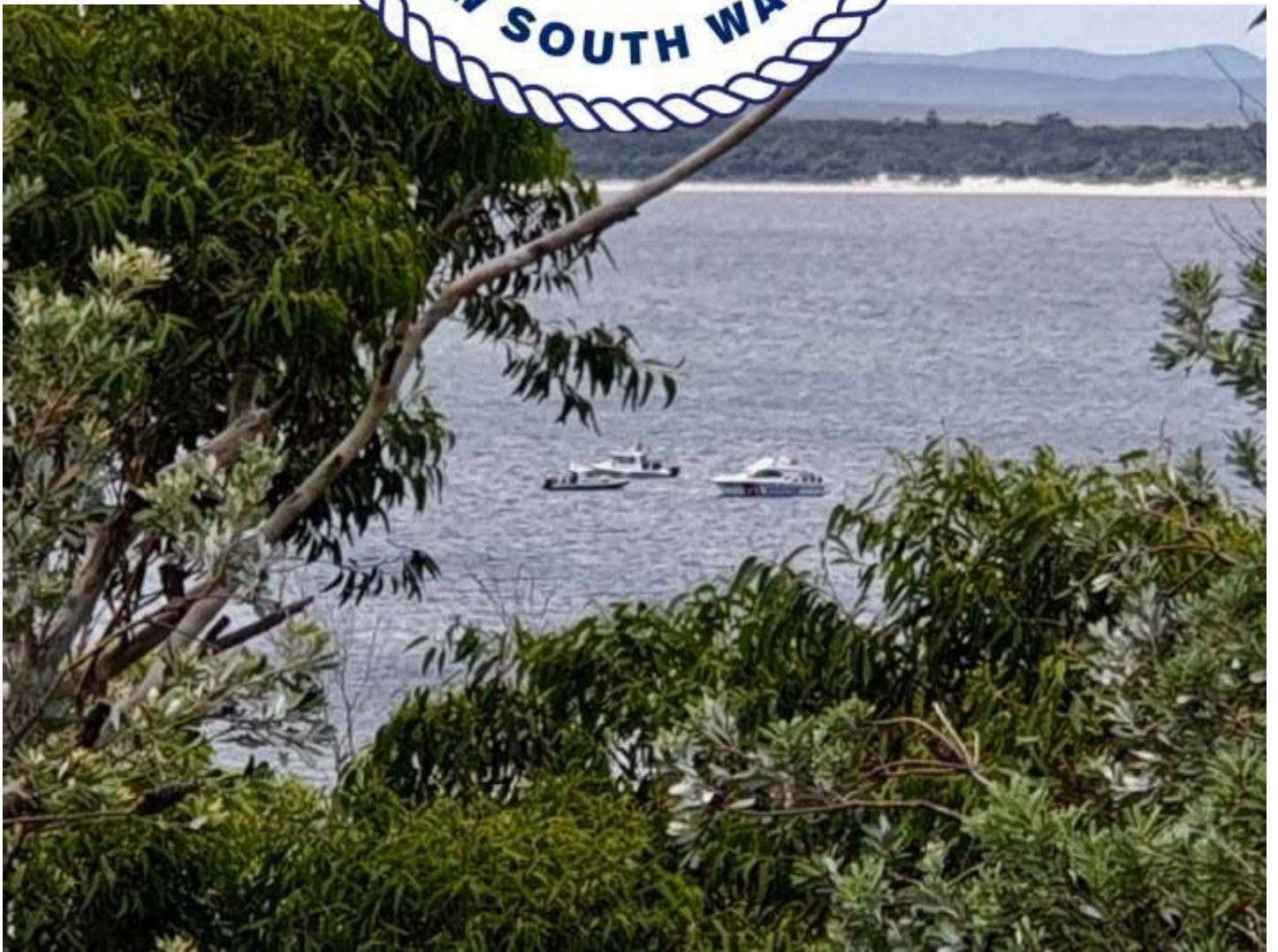


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# MARINE RESCUE NSW PORT STEPHENS UNIT

*'Volunteers Saving Lives on the Water'*