

PORT CHATTER



SPRING 2020
SEPTEMBER

MARINE RESCUE NSW PORT STEPHENS UNIT

'Volunteers Saving Lives on the Water'





MARINE RESCUE NSW – PORT STEPHENS UNIT

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VOLUNTEERS SAVING LIVES ON THE WATER

UNIT APPOINTMENTS

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Unit Training Unit Training Officer Gary Williams Assistant Training Officer Ray McLeod Training Systems Officer Angela O'Dea Training Systems Officer Jan Sami Rescue Vessels Training Officer Brian Bibbing Course Presenters: Paul Buckley, Colin Couper Peter Dentrinos, Neil Fraser, Trevor Moxham, Barney Pinney		

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



Well, it has certainly been a Winter of discontent with many of our norms set aside, possible forever. It has been no different for Marine Rescue Port Stephens and there have been enough challenges to keep me occupied in my first weeks as Unit Commander.

But firstly some good news. There have been some important achievements

since the last Port Chatter. The most notable being the refurbished dock for our rescue vessels. Many thanks to Tony O'Donnell our project officer who tirelessly and meticulously oversaw the project. Also thanks to the professional job done by the contractor Bellingham Marine.

The work could also not have been completed without the generous donations from benefactors, sponsors and a grant from the State Government, championed by our local member, Kate Washington. My sincere thanks to all. The new facility greatly improves our ability to access



safely our rescue vessels.

The Winter months may have seen some drop in the total number of local seafarers, with boat ramp closures and

distancing restrictions, but our services have been in regular demand. May, June and July saw us responding to 38 incidents (exactly the same as last year) and over three weeks in July, three MAYDAY calls.

Each tested our crews in different ways. On 4 July it was an 8m flybridge cruiser with engine failure, drifting towards the rocks at the south of Broughton Island. On the night of 8/9 July it was a 53ft ketch drifting towards the rocks on the north side of Broughton Island, with a person in the water. 25 July saw the most dramatic of the three MAYDAYs with a capsized workboat at the site of the old Huon Fish Farm with four people on the upturned vessel at night.

In each case the rescue was successfully carried out and professionally executed by our boat crews and Communications Centre personnel. The lessons from each underscored the importance of getting an accurate distress location to ensure the most rapid assistance is provided. Getting an accurate latitude and longitude from a distressed vessel is vital, particularly at night or in the open sea. If using a plotter, make sure your cursor is on your boat before giving a readout, or use an app such as Emergency+ on your mobile phone.

The other lesson that was brought home was that our most popular fishing spot and overnight anchorage, Broughton Is, has hazards that should never be taken for granted, particularly in deteriorating weather conditions.

These months haven't been without other challenges though. The alert in July that we had positive COVID-19 cases in our community caused 20 of crew to self-isolate for 14 days. Sadly, this caused us to cease night watch operations for the last seven weekdays of July - the first time in 38 years that the base has not operated 24/7. During that time Marine Rescue Sydney took over our night comms and we had to hand back comms to the RFS for the duration.

We are now back to full 24/7 operational status but are planning to adjust for longer term operation with the safety constraints imposed by COVID-19. As the new Unit Commander, I have certainly been impressed by the ready and professional manner in which our unit of volunteers has pulled together and adjusted cheerfully to these difficult times. My thanks to all for that extra effort.

Ben van der Wijngaart

Hello again to all our Advertisers

On 19 June Marine Rescue Port Stephens (MRPS) sent a communication explaining that whilst we ordinarily focus on the boating public we are mindful of you, our supporters, and your business which may have been going through difficult times recently.

The Editors and Command of MRPS have now determined the invitation to advertise without the obligation to pay should be extended to span not only Autumn and Winter Port Chatter (which have already gone out) but also the upcoming Spring Edition, ie an additional Quarter of "free runs" for our existing loyal advertisers.

You have probably read in local press that MRPS has been surprisingly busy with numerous Mayday rescues. Maydays are our most serious, sometimes dangerous, and usually expensive forms of search and rescue arising from imminent

risk of loss of life at sea. Happily, some advertisers have elected to pay through Autumn and Winter and we are most grateful as our costs have definitely not gone away. So, if for business reasons you wish to receive and pay an invoice before 30th September 2020 please respond now to me; geoff.will@inet.net.au I will promptly email an appropriate invoice.

Again, if you take up the "free run" offer we trust you will recommence payments commencing with the Summer Edition of Port Chatter. We will recommence invoicing before the Summer edition. Regardless of your decision please be assured we are extremely grateful for your past support of Marine Rescue Port Stephens and we wish you well in these most strange of days.

Geoff Williams - Assistant Editor



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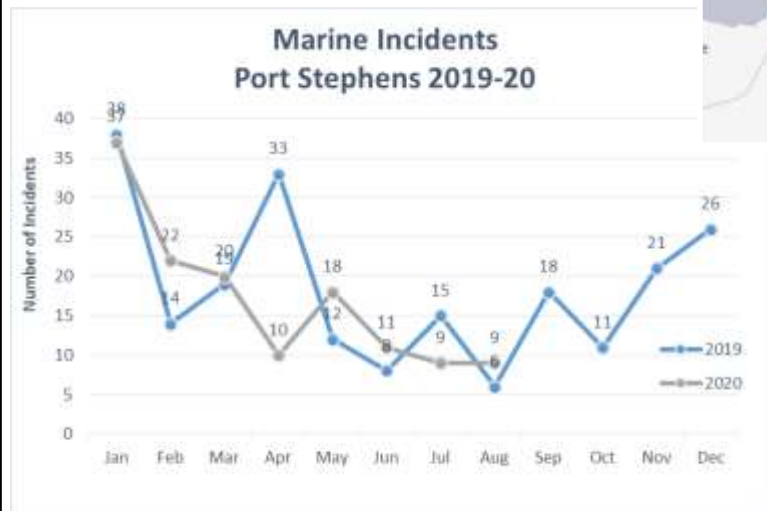
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OPERATIONS

OPERATIONS OFFICER

The Operations Group encompasses the Comms Centre, Rescue Vessel and Callout Officer functions.

We find ourselves at the back end of what has, to my mind, been a reasonably mild winter (more so if you discount the last week). Spring beckons as the days grow longer and the westerly winds abate. As I sit in my study compiling this article however, I'm struggling to recall a previous winter where we've had more strong wind and gale warnings than the current one, or where the seas have been quite as angry. Yep, without doubt, the East Coast lows which pummelled the area in April 2015 and again in January 2016 were extreme events the likes of which we haven't seen this year (thankfully), but they were also quite isolated examples of such weather. This year, whilst not reaching the extremes of the 2015/16 weather bombs, we seem to have been at the mercy of strong or gale force winds and tumultuous seas more often than not.



If you look at the number of marine incidents throughout the months of winter, from June to August, you can see that we've averaged just under 10 incidents per month. This number aligns with the average for last year too, but last year's chart is a little more volatile, with a strong peak in July which is missing this year. Why? I can only speculate but it's probably a combination of fewer visitors as a consequence of COVID-19, and maybe the prevailing conditions – wind and sea – which deterred many boaters from venturing out.

Recent Operations

Of those who did venture out, a handful found themselves in a less than favourable situation and had to call for help. Most were reasonably benign – a lack of fuel, an engine which would not start and so on – but a few were more serious, and two in particular demanded a very quick response.

The first of these began on the evening of 8 July 2020. It was just after 9 pm when an SMS was sent to all boat crew from the Duty Callout Officer (DCO). The SMS said simply 'SOLAS Esmerelda Cove', meaning a boat and its occupants were in serious trouble at Esmerelda Cove, one of the three recognised anchorages at Broughton Island. (see story later in this edition)

In the second SOLAS for the month, on 25 Jul 20, at just after 7 pm, Port Stephens' boat crew were again hastened to the dock. Reports this time were of four

persons in the water near the East cardinal marker of the old fish farm.

The fish farm sea pens had not been able to withstand the force of the East Coast lows which had rolled through this area in the last five years, and now all that remained on the surface were four cardinal markers to delineate the aquatic lease. One of these markers – the eastern most one – had recently drifted well north to Coal Shaft Bay at Broughton Island.



It subsequently transpired that the four people in the water were divers working to replace the missing marker. Their working boat – an aluminium runabout 8-10 metres in length and fitted with two large outboards – had been capsized by a wave, throwing the men into the water.

PS31 departed the dock just before 7:30 pm, with Barney as skipper and four crew (Anthony, Lisa, Murray and Richard). Initial information was scant as PS31 made best speed in the conditions. Anthony, on nav/radio, guided PS31 into the vicinity. Having made contact with one of the four

men via mobile phone, he had PS31's main spotlight set directly ahead. The man in distress was then able to call PS31 around until the spotlight pointed directly at him. Observers had also been deployed on either side of PS31 with powerful hand-held spotlights and these now swept the area. Within seconds, the port-side observer called out a contact about 100 metres away. He could discern a silhouette of what appeared to be four people sitting on the upturned hull of a boat. The boat itself appeared to be moored to an unlit marker.

Barney positioned PS31 about 5-10 metres off the upturned hull and parallel to it. The four men were quickly recovered one by one through the side gate on PS31 by Richard and Murray using a rescue quoit. As they were ungraciously hauled aboard PS31 by the two not insignificant lads, they were passed to Lisa – one of our First Aid trainers – for triaging. Of the four men, two were good, one was hypothermic and the fourth had a deep laceration to his left hand,

It was a quick trip back to the berth, before a waiting ambulance took the two injured men to hospital.

It may come as a surprise to some to learn that Marine Rescue Port Stephens shut down its overnight operations for a short period at the back end of July. The Unit is rightfully proud of its record of near continuous operations

(Continued on page 9)

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OPERATIONS AND GIFT SHOP

(Continued from page 7)

over the past 38 years, but a recent COVID-19 scare left us no choice but to shut down. It started with a visit to the Salamander Shops on 15 July by a local man who was unknowingly infected with the virus. A large number of local residents were caught up in the testing and self-isolation regime that followed and our volunteers weren't immune, so to speak. One third of the Unit's operational workforce was suddenly unavailable for duty. We looked at a number of options and in the end made a decision to reduce our operating hours. To this end, from 20 -31 July, we only operated from 0545 through to 1900 Sunday to Thursday. Outside of these hours, we redirected our telephones to the Marine Rescue base at Terrey Hills, and they monitored our radios remotely. We did manage 24 hour a day operations over the busier weekend period.

All of our members tested negative and we've now resumed full operations. At the end of the day, it was a good test of our business continuity procedures, and the changeover between local operators and the Terrey Hills base should have been transparent to anybody using our services. I must extend the Unit's thanks to Matt King, the Unit Commander at Terrey Hills, and his staff for the flexibility and spirit of cooperation they showed throughout this episode....

...and on that thankful note, I wish you all good health...

...and please remember to be COVID-19 safe and aware...

Richard Pizzuto



One of the rescues during the last couple of months, right. Below Australian Border Force visited the bay with one of their very impressive vessels.



GIFT SHOP

At last the shop is open again, albeit under the strict current health requirements i.e. two visitors only in the shop at any one time – exception for members of one family, after signing in and sanitising hands.

Six members of staff have stepped back temporarily, due to concerns about the pandemic, other members are doing double shifts to make up the shortfall.

We will be resuming the Monthly Gift Shop Staff Meeting from Thursday 10 September 1pm, this will be good for all members to discuss the current situation and moving forward so the shop can remain open.

We hope all members of the Unit stay safe and we look forward to seeing you in the shop.

Sandra Scheuber



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VALE BRUCE WEBSTER

BRUCE WEBSTER

13 AUGUST 1927 – 25 JULY 2019

On the morning of Sunday 16 August this year Bruce Webster, one of our late members of the **Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol** had his last wish carried out. This was for his ashes to be scattered in the waters of Port Stephens.

The request to have Bruce's ashes scattered on this day, came from his wife Pat and her family. I explained to Pat that we are in the 'Westerly Winds' season and things could be a bit rough out there on the water. However this is exactly how Bruce would have wanted it, a good stiff Westerly, with a good chop on the surface was, the response from Pat, and her family, all seasoned sailors.

The late Bruce Webster spent 25 years of his life giving service to the boating public, and the then **Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol**. Bruce held the rank of Divisional Commander and was the Officer in charge of Broken Bay for many years. Bruce, with wife Pat, first came to the Nelson Bay/Shoal Bay area in 1972 and loved the area so much they purchased a holiday home. Bruce owned a large motor cruiser and many trips from Sydney to Port Stephens was done by sea. Over the years Bruce could also see the need for a Radio Rescue station in the Port Stephens area. Bruce was also friends with our late Commander John Thompson. So the wheels were put in motion and a lot of expertise came from Bruce in assisting John, to form the **Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol** Port Stephens division at Nelson Head. Bruce was a professional journalist and while working in Canberra leading the parliamentary broadcast unit, he would lobby strongly for funding, and support for the many **Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol** divisions performing excellent jobs, looking out for the ever increasing boating public.

Bruce was also well known for a major roll that he played in the Nelson Bay/Shoal Bay area in leading a group of local residents in a campaign against, high-rise buildings proposed in the 1970s.

Skipper Sue Freeman, First officer Richard Pizzuto and coxswain Iain Blackadder along with Deck hand HG, welcomed Pat and her family on board **PS31 John Thompson** to follow out Bruce's last wishes.

The Westerly was blowing, the sea was very choppy and confused state, however Skipper Sue and her crew were able to position the Marine Rescue search and rescue vessel, 'PS John Thompson' off Shoal Bay beach /Nelson

Head, and hold a position to allow a family member to do the honours of scattering our dear late friend, and members ashes into the waters of his beloved Port Stephens waters.

Left is a photo of Bruce taken a week before he died,. On the 50th Anniversary of the Apollo moon landing he gave an interview with ABC Central Coast's Emma Simkin on his Apollo 11 coverage. "For the 3000 press who were there, it was something you never dream of," he said.

"The crowd that gathered was estimated to be a million people."

Bruce had been at Cape Canaveral covering the Apollo 11 mission for Channel 7.

From 1947 Bruce worked in various roles in radio and television news, presentation and reporting at the ABC until the 1960s. He then moved to commercial media, co-hosting *The Today Show* on Channel 7 with Patricia Lovell.

In the 1970s, Bruce left the media to run for New South Wales state politics as a member of the Liberal



Party. He succeeded Robert Askin in the seat of Pittwater in the 1975 election and was the party's spokesman on Mines and Energy.

Disillusioned with politics he left the parliament and joined Qantas in a public relations role. Eventually he returned to media and rejoined the ABC, moving to Canberra to present news and sport on 2CN 666 and to host the live radio broadcasts of Parliament on what is now ABC News Radio. He retired in 1992. He also received an Order of Australia (OAM) Medal, Queens Jubilee Medal and the Centenary Medal.

So you see he had a very varied life but Port Stephens was always a very special place for him.

R.I.P. our dear friend.

Harold Gibson

Acknowledgements: Pat Webster, TV Tonight David Knox and Wikipedia,



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NELSON HEAD RESERVE

NELSON HEAD RESERVE CHAIRMAN

We have a new name!! The Nelson Head Lighthouse and Rescue Station Reserve Trust has been abolished and a new entity formed, called the Nelson Head Reserve. This has come about through changes instituted by Crown Lands to reduce the number of Trust licences. Crown Lands have issued one licence to Marine Rescue NSW for all of the lands which house Marine Rescue Bases. Marine Rescue Port Stephens is the first unit to experience this change so the Nelson Head Reserve is now a business entity of Marine Rescue NSW and we will use their ABN for all official documents. The sub-committee of the Trust will transfer over to the Committee of the Reserve and all operations will remain as before. There will need to be some changes to signs around the Base and we will get these changes done over the next few months.

So, remember we are now the Reserve and all mention of the Trust will disappear.

**MU
SEA
UM**

The Reserve has received a grant from the Australian National Maritime Museum to assist with the refurbishment of the Light Room at the Nelson Head Cottage. The objective of the refurbishment is to recreate the

operation of the Inner Light which guided vessels into Port Stephens before the installation of more modern navigational aids.

The refurbishment will consist of:

- Manufacture and installation of white and red lanterns to reflect the original lanterns
- Renovation of the old Morse-code key which was used as the only means of communication between Port Stephens and Newcastle.
- Installation of a wall-mounted TV set to play a PowerPoint presentation on a continuous loop explaining how the original lights operated.
- Display of other artefacts related to the operation of the original Inner Light.

We are very excited about this project as it will recreate some of the original maritime history of Port Stephens.

With the Tea Rooms reopened on 1 June and the Cottage reopened on 1 July we are very happy to see the facilities at Nelson Head being used again. Some more displays have been put together for the Museum and we continue to add to the collection of artefacts which record some of our maritime history.

Weddings will return to Nelson Head in September and we have a busy period over the summer months. Guest numbers are somewhat restricted but we are still able to offer couples wishing to marry some of the best facilities and magnificent views in all of Port Stephens.

John Reid

NELSON HEAD INNER LIGHTHOUSE LIGHT ROOM



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BOATS OFFICER

BOATS OFFICER

COVID

We have now been able to recommence crew practical training. We have two crew trainees and two leading crew candidates now progressing well towards qualification.

As might be expected, social distancing is rarely practical aboard either rescue vessel. To date the use of face masks is recommended but optional. It is good to see their use becoming more and more prevalent aboard.

In practice we rely heavily on each crew member monitoring their own exposure likelihood and excluding themselves from crew activities and advising the OPSO if there is any doubt as to their Covid exposure status.

Dock Facility

The new pontoon structure underwent its first periodic maintenance procedure this month. The individual concrete pontoon sections are held together by long nonferrous rods with tensioning nuts on either end. Maintaining a proper



tension in these rods is essential for the continued structural integrity of the dock as a whole.

Over winter the reduced available daylight has meant that the solar array on the dock shed roof has only been capable of generating around 60% of the 24-hr load requirement of the facility. This has meant frequent visits to the dock by volunteers to run and supervise the stand-by generator. A new generator is on order which will not

require as much supervision with its ability to start and stop automatically in response to battery charge conditions. The new unit operates at a much lower noise level which will be a relief to our neighbours.

PS30

Both our rescue vessels recently underwent a regulation compass swing. This is required under survey to check the accuracy of the magnetic steering compass. The process quantifies magnetic deviation quadrant by quadrant and makes magnetic compensation when

practical and required. This procedure had not been completed previously on PS30.

PS30 is just about due for a 100 hourly engine service. This will involve lifting the vessel out of the water on the travel lift at the Boatyard to give the mechanics safe and adequate access to the engines. If all goes well this will mean no more than half a day out of service.

PS31

The next major milestone for PS31 is periodic out of water maintenance due sometime in September. The vessel will be hauled out at the Boatyard and the underside of the hull will be water

blasted and scrubbed before the application of new anti-fouling paint. While she is high and dry the propeller shaft bearing integrity and alignment will be checked and if necessary adjusted.

Work is underway to acquire and fit an omni directional satellite antenna to improve the usability of the handheld Thuraya satellite phone.

Barney Pinney

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INNER LIGHT WEDDINGS

WEDDING CO-ORDINATOR

Spring is certainly in the air at Nelson Head Reserve.

There are four weddings booked for September and three for October. We even have a proposal at the end of August, which is very exciting. 2021 already has one confirmed and five tentative bookings. We continue to receive enquiries for both 2021 and 2022.

From proposals to elopements and weddings, our stunning site is helping make dreams come true.

Venues holding wedding ceremonies and functions are now required to register a COVID-19 Safety Plan. This has been done as well as an additional plan developed

detailing how our volunteer team will be protected. Additional processes will be in place to minimise the risks for both our volunteers and attendees, including a trial of a mobile phone registration app. Many of you may have used this method (scanning a QRcode) at cafes or other eateries.

We look forward to sharing photos of the happy occasions in the next issue of Port Chatter. Until then stay safe.

Jenni Fryer
On behalf of
Inner Light Weddings Team



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THE LOSS OF SEA EAGLE

THE LOSS OF SEA EAGLE, AUGUST 1988

Amid great fanfare, an international fleet of 21 yachts set sail from Sydney at 0808 hrs on Monday 8 August 1988, on the first leg of the 7,600 nautical mile **Goodman Fielder Wattie Bicentennial Around Australia Yacht Race**. The starting gun was fired by sailor **Kay**



Cottee (right), who earlier that year had become the first woman to complete a single-handed, non-stop and unassisted circumnavigation of the world.

Some of the entrants were sailing under short-handed sailing rules with one or two person crews while other yachts were fully crewed. The weather forecast at the start of the race was for 30 to 40

knot gale force winds from the southwest, moderating, with three to four metre seas. However, as the yachts headed north, conditions worsened and between Pittwater and Newcastle wind speeds of 50 to 60 knots were encountered. By early evening as the yachts approached Port Stephens waves up to nine metres and wind gusts up to 70 knots were recorded. During the course of that night, three yachts were crippled, many others were damaged, a rescue vessel sank and one



crewman was lost overboard.

The crew of **Steinlager I**, an 18.3m trimaran skippered by New Zealander **Peter Blake** (above, photo National Library of New Zealand), reported encountering huge seas with waves up to nine metres and howling winds. Driving rain made radar navigation impossible and the 50 knot winds forced the two-man crew to endure the conditions without sail. 'We were running on just the wing mast during the worst of it and at times the yacht was surfing down the seas at more than 25 knots,' Blake said. The crew was able to control the trimaran by rotating the mast and using a trailing sea anchor.

Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol (RVCP) Port Stephens

Division radio base was monitoring communication with the fleet on VHF, HF and 27 MHz, but experienced difficult communication conditions on all frequencies throughout the emergency. As assistance calls started to be received, a search and rescue team assembled at the base to manage the emergency. The personnel involved were Neil Cameron (Senior Searchmaster), Mike Cleare (Assistant Searchmaster), Joe Leach (Radio Operator), John Weir (Radio Technician) and Harold



Gibson (Coastal Patrol/ Police Liaison). At that time the division did not have a suitable rescue vessel and were not able to participate directly in the rescue. (The division's first all-weather vessel **Giralong** (left), commenced service later that month.)

The first call for assistance was received around 1830 hrs from the yacht **Escapade II**, a 10.6m trimaran with a crew of two. **Escapade II**, one of the smallest yachts in the race, had been hit side-on by a steep, breaking 12 metre wave that capsized the yacht about eight nautical miles off Port Stephens. The crew were able to shelter within the overturned hull and continued to maintain radio contact with the RVCP radio base. Red flares from the distressed vessel were seen by another participant **Australian Pacific** which went to assist but was unable to get the crew off the overturned vessel due to the mountainous seas. Another participant **St. Therese**, also attended and stood by. A police helicopter from



Police launch Sea Eagle

Sydney illuminated the scene for some time but had to withdraw before a rescue vessel could arrive. On receipt of the Mayday call, the RVCP radio base immediately advised the Water Police, and the Police launch **Sea Eagle** (above Photo: Newcastle Herald, 9 August 1988.), with a crew of three was dispatched from Port Stephens to assist. **Sea Eagle** was a 13 m timber hulled vessel that had been purchased for \$400,000, commissioned in 1980, and had been stationed at Nelson Bay since then.

The RVCP search and rescue team, who were

(Continued on page 19)

SEA EAGLE.....

(Continued from page 18)

coordinating rescue efforts soon encountered problems communicating with **Sea Eagle**. The vessel was not equipped with VHF radio and although the radio base could hear the crew on 27 MHz, the crew were unable to hear transmissions from the base. Communications to the rescue vessel had to be relayed to the Newcastle Water Police via phone, who then communicated with **Sea Eagle** by UHF radio.

Sea Eagle battled through heavy seas and was within 0.5 nautical miles of **Escapade II** when a wave broke over the stern of the launch, tore off the rear transom door filling the aft section with water. The crew were able to restart the engine and decided to abandon the rescue attempt and return to port. The Police Sergeant aboard described how the crew tried to restart **Sea Eagle's** engines after the motors died on three occasions. "We took a wave over the back which filled the back sections of the boat up. The engines cut out and we restarted them - on the third occasion they wouldn't start."

About 1.5 nautical miles northeast of Cabbage Tree Island, with the engine lost and pumps disabled the **Sea Eagle** began to sink rapidly. The crew sent out a Mayday call around 0040 hrs and abandoned ship. "We got into an AFD life raft and set off flares. We radioed to get one of our local larger trawlers out" the Sergeant said.

Immediately following the sinking of **Sea Eagle**, local fishing boat operators in Nelson Bay were contacted seeking a volunteer to go to the assistance of the



Long-line fishing vessel Sarah J
Photo: Rowley-family, Nelson Bay

distressed Police. Jo Rowley, skipper of **Sarah J** offered his assistance and with two crew, set out through the heads accompanied by the two remaining local Water Police officers,. **Sarah J** was a 22.7m, 120 tonne long-line tuna fishing vessel built at Soldiers Point by Cec Hammond. It was originally built as a deep-sea prawn trawler and was converted to long-line fishing when acquired by the Rowley family in 1983.

A trawler crew member described the voyage. "We got to the heads and we couldn't see. The waves were too big. The waves were breaking over the bow and on the deck of the trawler. We pushed out further to about three miles outside the heads and then we saw some lights. We saw a police helicopter and then flares and then some lights

from the water. Then we saw the life raft bobbing up and down.' Skipper Jo Rowley described the seas and winds as the worst he had seen in years. "They were certainly very cold and thankful men when we got them out of the water", he said.

Harold Gibson recalled watching the mast light on the **Sarah J** yawing almost to horizontal as it made its way out through the heads. The search and rescue skills of Neil Cameron and his team at the RVCP radio base were instrumental in directing the responding aircraft and vessels to the drifting life raft. They assisted **Sarah J** locate the life raft by relaying radio calls to the attending Police helicopter which was also not equipped with VHF radio.

The crew of **Sea Eagle**, who were suffering from mild hypothermia, were recovered around 0220 hrs, taken back to Port Stephens on **Sarah J**, and admitted to the local hospital for observation. At around 0630 hrs the following morning, the crew of **Escapade** were winched to safety by a National Safety Council (NSC) helicopter after 12 hours sheltering inside the hull of their overturned yacht. They were flown to Williamstown, and then transferred to Newcastle hospital for observation.

The drama of the night was not yet over. The next vessel to encounter trouble was the yacht **Boundary Rider**, a 12 metre mono-hull with a crew of three. The yacht sent out a Mayday call at around 2300 hrs when it hit Mermaid Reef about five nautical miles northeast of Crowdy Head. **Boundary Rider** had rolled on its side and a crewman was thrown overboard. An NSC helicopter rescued the two surviving crewman and landed them on Seal Rocks beach. The search for the missing crewman was abandoned the following day.

The **Myuna III**, an 11 m mono-hull yacht with a crew of seven, lost its rudder during the evening of 8 August and was in danger of being swept onto rocks. The crew managed to deploy a sea anchor to stabilise the vessel and sail away from shore. The following morning the Police launches **Stackpool** from Newcastle and **Allen** from Sydney, arrived on scene and after a nine-hour tow, brought **Myuna III** into Port Stephens. While waiting for assistance, an NSC Dornier aircraft had maintained watch over the distressed vessel. During the course of the rescue, the Police launch **Stackpool** sustained substantial damage to doors, radios and other equipment while battling the huge seas. The crew of **Myuna III** subsequently abandoned the race.

Over the course of the night of 8 August and the following day the RVCP radio base made an estimated 70 calls on 27 MHz, 30 calls on VHF, 100 calls on HF and 25 land line calls. Rescue assets utilized included Police launches **Sea Eagle**, **Stackpool** and **Allen**, Police helicopter Polair II, an NSC helicopter, Cessna 310 and Dornier fixed wing aircraft, two Westpac Rescue helicopters and a private helicopter. Communications

(Continued on page 21)

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SEA EAGLE.... AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

(Continued from page 19)

were handled by RVCP Nelson Bay and Police radio Newcastle and Sydney.

As soon as the sinking of **Sea Eagle** became news, recriminations began to fly. The NSW Deputy Police Commissioner called the organisers foolhardy and stated they should never have allowed the race to start at that time of the year and under the prevailing conditions. The Minister for Police and Emergency Services said he would investigate police and legal powers over events such as yacht races and whether those involved could be charged for rescue operations. Police estimated the cost of the rescue was over \$3 million dollars and replacement of **Sea Eagle** at around \$540,000. However, race organiser Don McIntyre pointed out that it was the competitors themselves who made the final decision to start the race in full knowledge of forecast weather conditions. He also stated that the start of the race in early August had been researched in great detail to ensure participants were not exposed to cyclones across the north of Australia and winter gales in the Southern Ocean during later stages of the race. It was also acknowledged that **Sea Eagle** and **Stackpool** were not suited for offshore rescue work in heavy seas, and that conditions encountered that evening had pushed the launches and their crews to the limit.

The race was eventually won by the New Zealand entry **Steinlager 1**, crewed by Peter Blake and Mike Quilter who completed the eight legs of the race in 33 days and 17 hours. They had earlier sliced more than 10 hours off

the previous race record for the first leg from Sydney to Mooloolaba and more than halved the previous best time for an anticlockwise circumnavigation of the continent. The second vessel to cross the finish line in 38 days was **Verbatim**, a 12.8 m catamaran crewed by Cathy Hawkins and Ian Johnston. Peter Blake, who had previously won the 1984 Sydney Hobart Race, then went on to win the 1989-90 Whitbread Round the World Yacht Race in **Steinlager 1**.

Acknowledgement: Harold Gibson is gratefully acknowledged for suggesting this article and for providing archival material, records of the incident and his personal recollections of the night. My thanks also to members of the Rowley family who provided details of the rescue and a photo of **Sarah J**.

Neil Fraser



*New Zealand race winner, the trimaran Steinlager 1
Photo: Sail World, 11 April 2017*

COMMUNITY RELATIONS OFFICER

Our fundraising efforts looked ready to resume on 9 August with our first Bunnings barbeque since the pandemic forced them to be discontinued. However, with the new spike in COVID-19 cases Bunnings was forced to cancel them once again. When they resume we will be ready with new sanitization rules in place and a MRNSW Risk Analysis tick sheet for fundraising in place as well as our tap-and-go credit card donation system.



On 22 July we were visited at the Marine Base by Commodore John Townsend, Rear Commodore Dave Simm and sailing member Rich Cumberland from the Port Stephens Yacht Club who presented our maritime

museum with some very interesting nautical pieces. Most notably a WWII Japanese telescope believed to be an artillery mounted instrument. Other gifts included a sextant and a binnacle compass believed to date back to the late 1800's. They will be on display in our maritime museum once research into their exact history can be completed. Thank you PSYC!

Have you come across an injured marine animal lately and wondered who to contact? Our Comms Centre occasionally receives calls from the public with these inquiries so here is how we direct these calls:



For injured seabirds and reptiles (including sea turtles) contact the ASR (Australian Seabird Rescue) on 02 6686 2852.

For injured whales, dolphins and seals contact ORRCA (Organization for Rescue and Research of Cetaceans Australia) 24hrs/day on 02 9415 3333.



To report a fish kill, "a sudden or unexpected mortality of wild or cultured fish" contact our local NSW DPI Fisheries office at Taylor's Beach on 02 4916 3934.

(Continued on page 23)

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COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND FUND RAISING

(Continued from page 21)

When is a request for assistance not answered? Never! But in some cases the requestor receives assistance from a passing boat and cancels the request. This is what happened the evening of 8 August when two local fishermen called in to say they were out of fuel five nautical miles offshore after landing a 500kg shark! They were able to get assistance from another passing fisherman.

Well done boys!

Well that's it for another quarter. Spring is not too far away. Time to clean up the barbie and get the lawn in shape. Stay safe everyone.

Will Scott



FUNDRAISING OFFICER

Raffle Draw

On a beautiful morning in July (before the East Coast Low hit) our raffle for a much sought after BBQ was drawn. The draw took place in front of visitors enjoying the Tea Rooms and the beautiful views across the bay to the heads. Drawn by Jan Hill from Nelson Bay.

The winner was Candace from Cessnock. Her son Aaron from Soldiers Point, collected the prize for his mother. A side story is that Aaron is a boater in Port Stephens and regularly logs on with Marine Rescue before venturing out on the water.

Congratulations Candace. We hope you enjoy your prize.

Fund raising during these times is very important. Our ongoing costs continue while fund raising opportunities have been curtailed due to COVID-19

restrictions. Thanks for your support.

First prize for our new raffle, donated by Jan Hill is this lovely quilt. Tickets are on sale from our Gift Shop at Nelson Head, so come up for a visit, say hi to the hard working ladies and purchase your tickets.

As the warmer weather approaches our unit will be visiting the local boat ramps from time to time to help you with information regarding boating safety, and logging on. We just might sell you a raffle ticket as well so



please if you see us call over and have a chat we will even help you launch your boat. That will cost you a donation!!).



Stay Safe
Peter Young



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RFS LIAISON

Marine Rescue Port Stephens takes over the communications role for Lower Hunter and Hunter Valley RFS nightly. From around 5.30pm until 9am 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

The bushfire danger period begins again for Hunter Valley RFS on 1st September.

Thankfully it has been reasonably quiet during late autumn and winter with incidents handled by MRPS acting as Firecom in the table below.

For some fires, such as structure fires and car fires, brigade members need to be protected from acrid fumes by using Compressed Air Breathing Apparatus (CABA). Darlington Brigade participated in a CABA workshop recently at the Bulga Fire Control Centre where fires are

lit in a shipping container to simulate compartment fires. The photo shows what training is involved but in a real situation, temperatures of up to 400°C can be expected.

Colin Couper
Hunter Valley RFS Liaison



Prepare Act Survive

Darlington CABA Training

STATISTICS	Bush/Grass	Structure	AFA	MVA Car	CFR	Other	Total
HUNTER VALLEY							
May-20	2	2	2	6	1	4	17
Jun-20	6	-	1	5	1	3	16
Jul-20	3	2	-	4	2	3	14
Total	11	4	3	15	4	10	47
LOWER HUNTER							
May-20	19	6	2	22	10	12	71
Jun-20	15	3	5	24	5	18	70
Jul-20	13	1	7	10	11	8	50
Total	47	10	14	56	26	38	191
TOTAL	58	14	17	71	30	48	238

LOWER HUNTER

As you no doubt can see from the table above numbers for July were severely affected by our Covid19 shutdown. However operations have returned to normal with regular cremations of stolen cars on most week nights.

OLD AND NEW AT KARUAH RFS

The photos are of the old and new Rural Fire Service stations at Karuah. The keys for the new station were handed over to the brigade on 24 July. The old station which dates back to the sixties and is now in the process of being demolished. The new station of course is more spacious than the old.

Ross Debenham
Lower Hunter RFS Liaison



RECENT RESCUES & ASSISTS

BROUGHTON ISLAND RESCUE 8-9 JULY 2020

I was just settling down for a night of TV watching with my wife when the relaxed atmosphere was suddenly and ungraciously shattered by the loud claxon ringtone of my mobile, telling me an SMS had just arrived from the Duty Callout Officer (DCO). The time – 9:12 pm, on Wednesday, 8 July 2020. The SMS said simply 'SOLAS Esmerelda Cove', meaning a boat and its occupants were in serious trouble at Esmerelda Cove, one of the three recognised anchorages at Broughton Island, that unusually shaped landmass 10nm north-nor-east of Port Stephens.

I, like other boat crew, shot back a response to the DCO telling him I was on the way and would be at the dock within five minutes, before quickly dressing. I was out the door, in the car and off down the road in two minutes. I arrived at the dock four minutes later. I was the first to arrive and the dock was eerily quiet, so much so that I rang the DCO to confirm the SOLAS. As the phone rang, I saw another car enter the car park area, followed soon after by a third. I hung up – the SOLAS was real.



Mick and I hurriedly prepared Port Stephens 31 (PS31) – the Unit's 38 foot Steber rescue vessel – for sea, whilst Matt jumped into the navigator/radio position and made contact with the . Harry was the lone watchkeeper on duty at the Comms Centre that night and had fielded the panicked call from the large ketch just before 9 pm saying they had dragged their anchor and were now within metres of the rocks. He had conveyed this information to the NSW Police Marine Area Command (MAC) operations room in Sydney and to the DCO. Neil – a highly experienced DCO – had then calmly gone about calling out a crew via a SOLAS SMS, a somewhat rare procedure reserved for



the most serious incidents where human life is in 'grave and imminent danger'.

Night operations with PS31 are normally undertaken with a crew of five – a skipper, a nav/radio, helm/systems operator, and two deckhands – one forward and one aft; and so it was on this night. Within minutes of the first three, the final two crew – Barney (the skipper) and Iain arrive at the dock. To this point, none of the crew have much of a picture of what it is they have responded to; all they know is there is a SOLAS situation in Esmerelda Cove. As Matt gathers information however, their awareness rapidly improves. Within minutes, the skipper and crew have a much fuller picture of what it is they're facing: a large 52 foot steel hulled ketch of 30 tonnes and with three men on board has dragged its anchor in Esmerelda Cove, cannot start its engines and is now dangerously close to rocks. Matt also gathers the latest observed and forecast weather from the Comms Centre; the observed winds are light, at only four knots, but the Bureau of Meteorology forecast is for strengthening winds up to 25 knots, a southerly swell of two to three metres and seas of one-and-a-half to two metres; nothing really nasty, but enough to make the trip to Broughton and back a little uncomfortable.

Barney finalises his responsibilities as the rest of crew complete the Open Ship checklist. Barney then musters the crew and briefs them. Our priority is to save the three souls onboard. Saving the vessel however might be problematic given her size and displacement; at 52 feet and 30 plus tonnes, she's longer but also much heavier than PS31 and towing her to safety won't be easy.

PS31 departs her berth just after 9:30pm. Matt has already selected a course for Esmerelda Cove and provides Barney with a heading to follow as we depart the marina. There's a near full moon tonight, but there's also plenty of cloud around to shroud it.

Visibility varies therefore between quite good and poor, dependent

on the interaction of the two.

As we track towards Yacaaba – that imposing northern sentinel of Port Stephens – the moon is low in the east but free of cloud, and casts a reflective light off the sea. The crew are therefore able to observe the sea and swell

(Continued on page 27)

RECENT RESCUES & ASSISTS....

(Continued from page 26)

as PS31 runs out on the Corrie light. There's very little sea to speak of. There is a swell of two metres or so, but it's what I like to call quite lazy – long wavelengths making for a reasonably comfortable ride.

In these fair conditions, Barney is able to push PS31 to 20 knots. Our course takes us between Cabbage Tree and Boondelbah Islands and then on a heading of 040 degrees to approach Esmerelda from the east.



Up in the Radio Base, Harry has stayed in touch with the distressed vessel (DV), providing regular updates on PS31's progress.

Now, as PS31 approaches within five miles of Broughton, Matt takes over communications with the vessel. Not long after having done so, things suddenly get a little interesting. In an effort to secure the vessel and prevent it drifting onto rocks, the crew on board the ketch have decided to deploy a second anchor. To this end, one of the crew boards the ketch's small aluminium tender (fitted with a small outboard motor) with the second anchor and proceeds to motor away from the ketch. Matt is talking to the skipper of the ketch at this very moment. The skipper is telling Matt what they're doing when the sudden alarm in his voice alerts Matt to a developing emergency. The small tender has been capsized by a wave, its upturned form suddenly emerging from the surrounding darkness. The man on board is nowhere to be seen. The two men on board the ketch search desperately for their friend in the water, their concerns rising by the second...and then...relief. The man appears at the rear of the boat, his inflated lifejacket enveloping his head. He is quickly helped aboard; he's cold and wet, but uninjured...and alive thanks to his lifejacket. He had been thrown out of the tender when it flipped, had pulled the toggle on his jacket and then calmly swam to the rear of the boat!

Matt conveys this dramatic little episode to the rest of the crew as they continue north at best speed. The silhouette of the island is clear to see as we approach from the south.

The position provided by the DV puts them in Esmerelda Cove. PS31 approaches the cove cautiously; crewmen

are deployed on either side of the vessel with hand-held spotlights to illuminate the nearest hazards – invariably large rock formations with white water around and over them.

Esmerelda Cove is open to the south, and the southerly swell is stirring up the cove. Skipper and crew ask themselves why a large ketch would choose such an anchorage in the prevailing conditions as they edge into the cove as far as they dare. Spotlights light up the cove, but there is no sign of a ketch, or any other vessel for that matter, in the area. Matt is talking with the DV again to confirm their position and asks if they can see our navigation lights. They can't and the conclusion is inevitable – they are not in Esmerelda Cove. In an inspired moment, Matt asks the skipper to screen shot his mobile phone; the Navionics app the skipper is using clearly shows own vessel position as a pulsating red dot. The skipper does as requested and sends Matt an SMS



of the screenshot, and suddenly all is clear. The actual position of the vessel is only about 400 metres north of their original estimate as the crew flies, but in the context of Broughton Island, it is an entirely different anchorage – Providence Bay, or North Beach to some. It is well protected from southerly swells, but tricky to navigate, with reef systems and bomboras galore. Navigating through here at night is not for the faint hearted; there is little room for error, and both navigator and helmsman need to be right on the money when it comes to determining and steering a course.

PS31 departs Esmerelda and heads east and then north around Little Broughton Island before settling on a north-westerly course. The crew can now see the lights of the ketch off to port, but avoid the temptation to steer directly for her; the waters between them are awash with reefs. Mick drops into the forward port seat alongside Barney and backs Matt up on the navigation as we cautiously make our way towards the ketch's position. We negotiate a course between two bomboras and finally break out into

(Continued on page 28)

RECENT RESCUES & ASSISTS

(Continued from page 27)

less treacherous waters, with a clear run now to the DV. As we approach the vessel, her predicament quickly becomes plain for all on PS31 to see. She is riding a



Dangerously Close to Rocks



Tow Line



Crew Preparing to pass the tow line



Anchored safely at Shoal Bay

single anchor at something less than 20 metres from a rock wall. To reinforce just how close the ketch was to rocks, the skipper later related to me how the vessel had swung around in the shifting wind only minutes before our arrival on scene; as she swung around, the skipper had watched helplessly as the rear of his vessel passed within three inches of the rock wall.

It was obvious to all that time was of the essence. Barney assessed the situation and quickly decided to reverse PS31 in towards the ketch, get her on a short tow and drag her to safer waters. The crew responded immediately; Mick prepared a heaving line, lain the tow line and I positioned myself on the rear deck with a spot light to illuminate the hapless ketch and surrounding rocks. As Barney reversed PS31 in, I called out the distance off...15 metres, 10...5...Mick threw a heaving line. It bounced off the railing and fell into the water, the skipper on the bow of the ketch trying desperately but unsuccessfully to recover the heaving line with a boat hook. Barney pulled away as Mick quickly reset, and then began a second approach. Ten metres...5...4...3...2...Mick's throw sailed across the forward deck of the ketch and was quickly recovered by the skipper, who wasted no time in setting the bridle. Barney had edged forward and lain now locked off the tow line at 10 metres or so. It was imperative that Barney establish some

distance between the ketch and rocks as quickly as possible, but the ketch's anchor first needed to be recovered. The towline 'sang' a little as the power came on; Barney dragged the ketch over her anchor to assist in its recovery, and the crew on board the ketch did a sterling job of getting their anchor back on board in trying conditions. As the anchor broke the surface, Barney commenced the tow proper. Again, the tow line sang under the strain of the ketch's 30 tonnes, but her head did turn slowly to follow in PS31's wake. With every passing moment, the distance between ketch and rock increased, much to the relief of those onboard both vessels. Initially the tow was quite unsettled, probably as a consequence of its short length and the prevailing conditions. The ketch rolled from side to side, snatching the tow line and dragging the stern of PS31 around. The short tow continued for several minutes until both vessels were in safe water, and then the tow was lengthened to a more judicious length of 30-40 meters.

Matt plotted a very conservative course for home, accommodating wide arcing

turns. Towing speed was limited to five or so knots, making for a slow trip home. The conditions thankfully were quite reasonable, and the longer tow made for a more stable ride all round. Back through the islands some two hours after leaving Broughton and then intercept the Corrie light. A few larger swells coming through the heads to keep us honest, before turning to port for Shoal Bay.

Options as to what to do with the large ketch are somewhat limited. Mooring is out of the question; at 30 tonnes, she is well in excess of the 20 tonne load limit applicable to public and emergency moorings. Berthing her in the Nelson Bay marina is also out. She's simply too big for PS31 to manoeuvre safely within the confines of a marina. Anchoring in Shoal Bay seems the best option, and the skipper agrees. We tow the ketch into the middle of Shoal Bay, where the water depth is good for anchoring and where she'll be protected from the prevailing swell and the westerlies forecast to hit the Bay in the following days. She sets an anchor, then drops the tow. We come alongside to wish them well before we turn for home. It's a quick run back to Nelson Bay to clear the diesels before we re-enter the marina, berth and close-up PS31, and then go our separate ways. Log off time is 0212 on Thursday, 9 July 2020, five hours to the minute after the SOLAS SMS which first stirred the crew of PS31 into action.

Richard Pizzuto,
Operations Officer

SOME COMMON BIRDS OF BROUGHTON ISLAND



The **Brown Quail** is a small, plump ground dwelling bird, 17 - 20 cm length. It has a red eye and is finely streaked with white above and barred beneath. Quail feed on the ground on seeds, grass and insects. They tend to be secretive forming small family groups amongst rank grasslands, and are most commonly observed when flushed. The birds burst explosively from cover, flying a short distance on a confusion of noisy wings and metallic whistling sounds. They can be encountered on all areas of Broughton Island.



The **Golden-headed Cisticola** is a small warbler, 9 - 11 cm length. In breeding season, the male has a golden-orange head, with a paler chin and throat, and a boldly streaked black to dark grey and golden body. The short tail is black, with paler tips. Females resemble non-breeding males, with buff-brown upper parts, heavily streaked black and dark brown, with a golden-buff rump and nape of neck. The underparts are cream with buff tints, and black wings. Call is a drawn out metallic buzzing *trzzzeeep* interspersed with musical *tewip* calls. On Broughton Island they are found in areas of long grass where they feed on insects and seeds.



The **Silvereye** is a small bird, 11 - 13 cm length, with a conspicuous ring of small white feathers around a dark eye. It has a grey back and breast, olive head and wings, and chestnut flanks. Silvereyes form small gregarious flocks, foraging in trees and undergrowth for insects, fruit and nectar. Call is a clear, sharp *tsweeip-cheeip*, *peeip-a-chweip*, *cheeip*. The birds can be seen foraging noisily in banksia, melaleuca and wattle on all parts of Broughton Island.



The **Tawny Grassbird** is a small unobtrusive warbler, 17 - 19 cm length, with a rufous brown head and back, heavily streaked with black. Underparts are pale with fine black streaks. Tail is long, brown and dark streaked. The male has a conspicuous display flight, fluttering with tail spread and pointing downwards. Call is a loud squeaky sequence of descending reeling notes, finishing with a harsh chuckling note. Grassbirds preferred habitat is tall grass lands and rushes where it forages mainly for insects. It can be found amongst most areas of thick grass or heath on Broughton Island.



The **Welcome Swallow** is slender aerial feeding insectivore, metallic blue-black above, light grey breast and underparts, and a rusty forehead, throat and upper breast. It has slender tapered wings and a prominent forked tail. Body length is 14-15 cm. It forages for insects on the wing, hunting in swift graceful aerobic swoops, banks and turns. Call is a single squeaky *tzeck*. On Broughton Island swallows are most commonly seen around the huts in Esmeralda Cove where the birds nest below the eaves.



The **Yellow-faced Honeyeater** is a small-medium greyish-brown bird, 16 - 18 cm length, with a distinctive yellow stripe on the side of its head. A black eye stripe is present above the yellow stripe with a small off-white patch behind the eye and another distinctive black strip below. Chin and throat are pale greyish-brown with dark grey streaks. The outer parts of the wings are olive. Call is cheery, ringing *whit*, *whit*, *whit* and *chwikup chwikup*. Diet is nectar, pollen, fruit, seeds and insects. On Broughton Island, they can be seen foraging in banksia trees between Esmeralda Cove and North Beach.

SOME COMMON BIRDS OF BROUGHTON ISLAND



The **Little Wattlebird** is a medium to large honeyeater, 27 - 31 cm in length. It is dark grey-brown above, with faint white shafts on the end of its feathers. The underparts are grey and heavily streaked with white. In flight, there is a large prominent rufous patch in the wings. Calls include a strident *cookay-cok*, a raucous *fetch-the-gun*, a mellow guttural *yekkop-yekkop* and many squeaky, musical lilting notes. It can be seen foraging on nectar in banksia trees between Esmeralda Cove and North Beach.



The **Silver Gull** has a white head, body, and tail, and light grey wings with white-spotted, black tips. Adult body length is 40 - 45 cm. Juveniles have brown patterns on their wings, and a dark beak. Adults have bright red beaks—the brighter the red, the older the bird. The most common call is a harsh, high pitched *kwarwh*. Silver gulls breed on Broughton Island and can be seen on the beaches and rocky headlands around Esmeralda Cove in the company of juvenile birds.



The **Sooty Oystercatcher** is a large, stocky wader with black plumage, a red eye, scarlet eye-ring and bill, and pink legs. It is 40 - 52 cm in length. It forages in the intertidal zone, for the two hours either side of low tide. Females take mostly soft-bodied prey such as small fish, crabs and worms while males prefer hard-shelled prey such as mussels, shell fish, periwinkle and oysters. Their call is a clear, piping *kier-kier-kier-kier*. They can be seen foraging or roosting on rocky shores around Esmeralda Cove and North Beach.



The **White-bellied Sea-Eagle** is a large raptor with a white head, white underparts and rump, and dark grey wings. It has a large, dark grey hooked bill and dark brown eye. Juvenile sea eagles are mostly brown. Body length is 75 - 85 cm and wingspan 1.2 - 1.8 m. It feeds on fish and other sea creatures, birds and mammals. Call is a harsh, nasal, goose like honking *ank, ak-ak, ank, ak-ak*. It can be seen over all parts of Broughton Island soaring gracefully on long upswept wings with fingered tips.



The **Whistling Kite** is a large, scruffy looking, ginger-brown kite with a long, rounded pale-tipped tail and pale 'M' shaped under-wing panels. In flight it soars and glides languidly on slightly down swept wings, with a fanned tail and widely fingered wing-tips. Body length is 50 - 60 cm and wing span 1.2 - 1.5 m. Call is a rapid, sharp, descending *peee-aa-rgh, ka ke-ki-kii*. Whistling Kite feed on carrion, small animals, birds, fish and insects and can be seen soaring over all parts of Broughton Island.



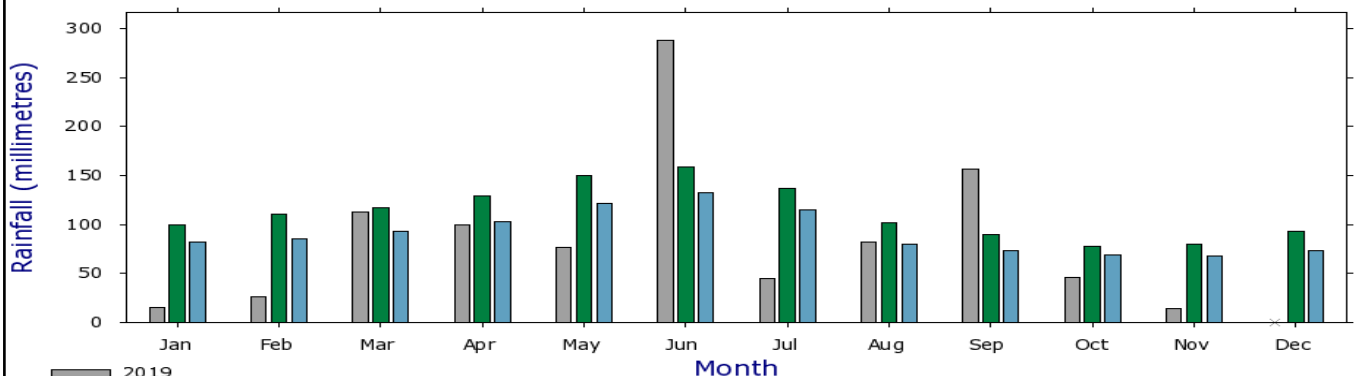
The **Black-shouldered Kite** is a small, pale grey raptor with a white head and distinct black shoulder patch. It has a large red eye, a small, dark grey slightly hooked bill and yellow feet. In flight the under-side of the wing tips are dark grey. Body length is 35 - 38 cm and wing span 80 - 95 cm. The kite is distinguished by its ability to hover on rapidly flapping wings while stalking prey such as small reptiles, rodents and insects. Call is a short, plaintive *sieep* repeated at five second intervals. It can be seen perching on aerials and in dead trees around Esmeralda Cove.

Neil Fraser - Twitcher

PORT STEPHENS WEATHER

Williamtown, NSW - July 2020					Williamtown, NSW - August 2020				
Date	Day	Temps		Rain	Date	Day	Temps		Rain
		Min	Max				Min	Max	
		°C	°C	mm			°C	°C	mm
1	We	4.2	19.8	0	1	Sa	4.7	18	0
2	Th	3.7	23.5	0.2	2	Su	5.6	20.1	0
3	Fr	8.1	19.3	0	3	Mo	3.6	21	0
4	Sa	6.7	15.6	1.6	4	Tu	4.1	22	0
5	Su	6.5	17.9	0	5	We	3.4	16.3	0
6	Mo	6.2	17.8	0	6	Th	3.8	15.6	0
7	Tu	5.9	18.4	0	7	Fr	3.6	12	0
8	We	9.6	16.2	4	8	Sa	6.6	15.9	3
9	Th	5.1	19.5	0	9	Su	7.9	15.8	2.8
10	Fr	9	17.2	0	10	Mo	6.2	16.6	8.4
11	Sa	10.4	18.8	0.6	11	Tu	9	17.4	18.4
12	Su	7.9	19.2	1.8	12	We	7.4	17.9	0
13	Mo	5.9	16.3	17	13	Th	8.3	22.7	1.2
14	Tu	7.9	16.5	24.6	14	Fr	9.2	17.4	0
15	We	11.2	16.5	4	15	Sa	10.5	19.7	5
16	Th	10.5	16.3	0	16	Su	12.1	19.6	0
17	Fr	12.2	14.6	0	17	Mo	10.7	19.7	0
18	Sa	10.2	16.5	7.8	18	Tu	10.1	19.6	0
19	Su	5.8	20.3	0	19	We	5.5	22.2	0
20	Mo	8.2	18.5	0	20	Th	10.7	18.4	0
21	Tu	4.6	16.7	0	21	Fr	5.9	19.5	0
22	We	6.2	16.3	0	22	Sa	10.2	16.1	0
23	Th	4.9	18.1	0	23	Su	8.3	17.6	0
24	Fr	3.3	18.1	0	24	Mo	8.4	17.9	0
25	Sa	5.5	18.3	0	25	Tu	5.7	16.3	0
26	Su	11.3	16.4	23.4	26	We	4.2	17.8	0
27	Mo	12.9	16.2	133	27	Th	2	21.9	0
28	Tu	11.2	14.8	16.2	28	Fr	8.1	19.1	0
29	We	9.7	18.7	8.4	29	Sa	4.5	21.0	0
30	Th	8.9	18.5	0	30	Su	3.8	25.2	0
31	Fr	8	17.2	0	31	Mo	6.7	25.5	0
Statistics for the month of July 2020					Statistics for most of August 2020				
Mean		7.8	17.7		Mean		6.8	18.7	
Lowest		3.3	14.6	0	Lowest		2	12	0
Highest		12.9	23.5	133	Highest		12.1	25.5	18.4
Total				242.6	Total				38.8

Nelson Bay (Nelson Head) (061054) 2019 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 2005-2019

People saved/ assisted	5,883
Rescues and assists	2,528
Value of vessels saved	\$248M+
Rescue Crew volunteer hours	60,932+
Radio Base volunteer hours	298,200+
Radio calls made/received	304,758
Telephone calls made/received	284,594

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

Volunteers saving lives on the water



IN APPRECIATION....

Contributors to this issue of *Port Chatter*:

Colin Couper, Ross Debenham, Neil Fraser, Jenni Fryer, Harold Gibson, Barney Pinney, Richard Pizzuto, John Reid, Will Scott, Ben van der Wijngaart. Other photos by Stephen Alta, Colin Couper, Ross Debenham, Penelope Highland, Tony O'Donnell, Richard Pizzuto, Will Scott, and Peter Young. 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. The following people give of their time (and petrol) in making deliveries. Distribution Co-Ordinator: Ross Debenham, Maureen Wheatley, Peter Merlino, Elizabeth Francis, Marian Chappell, and Deb Nolan.

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		Soldiers Point Marina
	Boating Sales and Repairs	Nelson Bay Outboard Services
	Fishing Supplies	Duff's Salamander Bait & Tackle (at Coles Express)
Motor Vehicles	Service Stations/Tyres	Fingal Bay Service Station and Tyres
Windscreen Repairs		Novus Autoglass Shop
Real Estate		Century 21 Paradise Waters, Nelson Bay
Restaurants and Cafes		Inner Light Tea Rooms, Nelson Head
Radio Station		Port Stephens FM 100.9



Aerial view of Tea Gardens

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.

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