

# PORT CHATTER



SPRING 2021  
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 - SEPTEMBER 2021**

<p><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></p>		<p><b>Community Relations</b>  <b>Community Relations Officer Will Scott</b>          Public Relations/Social Media Vacant          Editor Port Chatter Penelope Highland          Assistant Editor Geoff Williams          Fund Raising Officer Peter Young          Social Media (Facebook) Murray O'Dea          Social Committee: Lisa Lodding          Webmaster Vacant          Donation Boxes Angela Tilling</p>	
<p><b>Unit Commander Ben van der Wijngaart</b>  <b>Welfare / Liaison Harold Gibson</b>          Assistant Jenny Fitzsimons  <b>Protocol Officer Harold Gibson</b>  <b>Deputy Unit Commander Colin Couper</b>          Emergency Services Liaison Officer Laurie Nolan          Data Management/Network/Comms Lee Ryman,          Brian Richardson, Howard Faulks</p>		<p><b>Corporate Services Administration Officer Jenni Fryer</b>  <b>Assistant Krystyna Winslow</b>          Clerical Assistance Erica Smith          WH&amp;S Officer Jenni Fryer          Honours/Awards Krystyna Winslow          Providedore Julia Lynch          Unit Meeting Supply Jenny Fitzsimons, Deb Buckley          Data / Stats Maureen Wheatley          Supply Margaret &amp; Andrew Morrison          Membership Loris Webster, Erica Smith</p>	
<p><b>Operations</b>  <b>Operations Officer Laurie Nolan</b>          Assistant Operations Officer Sue Freeman          Communications Centre Manager Nigel Eves          Assistant Manager Dee Gilliland          Rosters Manager Will Scott          Assistant Angela O'Dea, John Lee          On Call Watch Officer: Neil Fraser, Dieter Greiter,          Frank Van Druten          Duty Callout Officers: Neil Fraser, Frank Van Druten,          Peter Dextrinos, Julian Liddy-Meaney, Graeme Abberton          Radio Club Manager Elizabeth Francis          Boats Manager Mark Kelly          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, Ray McLeod (MR Master)</p>		<p><b>Facilities</b>  <b>Facilities Officer John Reid</b>          Property Officer Vacant          Asst PO/Projects Vacant          Maintenance Steve Chauncy          Jim Christie, Alan Woodward,          John Woodbridge, Steve Spear          Security John Smith          Electrical Services Doug Craike; Dieter Greiter          Cleaning Contractor Mel White          Cottage Manager Greg Walsh          Curator/Historian Vacant          Rosters Alan Woodward          Wedding Co-ordinator Jenni Fryer          Team Bloss Cleary, Lynn Gibson, Greg Walsh          Jenny Fitzsimons, Harold Gibson          Tours Harold Gibson          Tea Rooms Liaison John Reid</p>	
<p><b>Unit Training</b>  <b>Unit Training Officer Ray McLeod</b>          Assistant Training Officer Peter Dextrinos          Training Systems Officer Angela O'Dea, Jennifer Dunn          Rescue Vessels Training Officer Brian Bibbing          Course Presenters: Paul Buckley, Colin Couper,          Neil Fraser, Ray McLeod, Trevor Moxham,          Ben van der Wijngaart          First Aid Presenters: Peter Dextrinos, Lisa Lodding</p>		<p><b>Contributions</b> are most welcome from all 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.</p>	
<p><b>Finance</b>  <b>Treasurer Adrian Hill</b>          Assistant Vacant          Grants Officer John Reid          Gift Shop Manager Sandra Scheuber          Gift Shop Bookkeeper Denise Olsen</p>		<p><b>Cover Photo:</b> Clinton J Down Photography</p>	

## 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

### UNIT COMMANDER



A lot has happened between Port Chatters – and a lot hasn't happened! A bit like Charles Dickens' opening to 'A Tale of Two Cities', "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times"

If you need to be reminded of the latter, you must have been on another planet these last three months.

The challenge is to see the former amongst the pressing gloom that we are fed daily about the pandemic and now about the distressing events in Afghanistan, Myanmar, etc.

The worst of times invariably brings out also the best in humanity - like \$6m raised on the internet over a week in mid-August to help Afghans targeted by the Taliban, or the Polish Olympian who auctioned her silver medal won in the recent Tokyo Olympics for her infant's heart surgery, but the winning bidder then refusing to accept it.

Locally it's no different other than in scale and lack of fanfare in the press. Such as the tireless efforts of Landcare groups working to preserve our local environment and the efforts at Hope Cottage in Church St Nelson Bay and by St Vincent de Paul to help those in need despite the difficulties in which their volunteers must operate.

All this tends to go under the radar, as do the efforts of so many other volunteer groups who continue to operate despite the adversity, and also at some inevitable increased risk to themselves.

National Volunteer Week was now some months ago in May, but I haven't had the opportunity to recognise our local volunteers. Our Council suggest there are 700 volunteers in the Port Stephens area, but I suspect there

are many more who work quietly alone or in small groups to make our lives, and particularly those of the less fortunate in our community more bearable and safer.

As the unit commander for one such organisation in our community, with around 180 members, I would like to take the opportunity to make a public 'shout out' to our members.

I occasionally get sympathetic members of Marine Rescue Port Stephens concerned at how I'm coping with the additional demands of managing the Unit under COVID restrictions. I won't lie – it's a challenge at times. But my answer is always (an honest one) that I get much more out of my role than I put into it. In fact, it's almost an exponential relationship. I believe it's the same for most volunteers.

I must nevertheless publicly thank my Unit Executive, in particular, for their constant, hard-working, cheerful and vital support and also all those other members. The ones who staff the Communications Centre at Nelson Head 24/7 as well as the boat crews standing by to spring into action come rain, gale, shine or pandemic. Thanks also to those who staff the Gift Shop and look after the Cottage Museum, maintain the grounds and attend fund raising events – all of whom help, directly and indirectly, to raise essential funds to achieve our mission of 'saving lives at sea'. Life has been particularly difficult and frustrating with the lockdown for you, I know.

So, for those in our community who don't know what to do with all that extra spare time you now have, instead of reaching for a psychologist to keep you sane, you could do worse than consider volunteering for Marine Rescue (we resume inductions in January 2022) or for one of the many other volunteer organisations in our LGA.

That's where we can show each other that there are still the 'best of times', even in the 'worst of times'.

***Ben van der Wijngaart***



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## DEPUTY UNIT COMMANDER

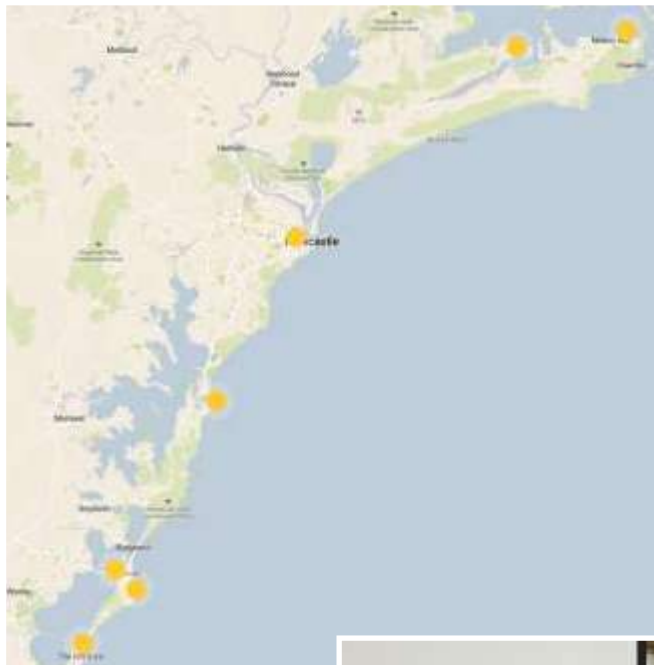
### DEPUTY UNIT COMMANDER

So, here we sit under MRNSW Level 3 lockdown conditions again. Have no doubt we stay on watch for boaters in trouble 24/7 but Nelson Head seems so deserted with none of the public visiting the Tearooms, Cottage or Gift Shop. Those of us on duty do miss the



usual fun and warm interaction with our colleagues, especially with the Gift Shop ladies.

Before the lockdown, the Unit successfully hosted the Hunter Central Coast (HCC) bi-monthly regional meeting of Unit Commanders and Deputy Unit Commanders in June.



Apart from Port Stephens, the Units in this region are **Lemon Tree Passage, Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Norah Head, Tuggerah Lakes and Central Coast.** The meeting was hosted by the Regional Operations Manager and included through the wonders of Zoom teleconferencing, personnel from HQ. Also in attendance at Nelson Head

was **Deputy Commissioner Alex Barrell**, CFO Andrew Todd and Regional Training Officer Jane Sherriff. Alex and Todd were also involved in the Unit meeting the previous night, where the Unit was able to show off a large and enthusiastic roll up of members and hear Alex's outlook for MRNSW. Various service awards were presented, the most outstanding for **30 years membership to the indomitable Shirley Clarke and Maureen and**



Maureen and Brian Wheatley



Shirley Clarke and Alex Barrell

**Brian Wheatley for their 20 Years service**. It was very instructive and the availability of and interaction with Alex and Todd was certainly taken advantage of and greatly appreciated.

Our IT group has been busy not only keeping our necessary IT and radio equipment up to scratch but also attending online meetings and developing new software. Lee Ryman continues to maintain our equipment and has written an app that sits in the corner of the computer screen at each station showing the Radio Direction Finder (RDF) readings for both VHF ch16 and 27MHz ch88 radios. The bearing of a signal coming into the Comms Centre is the first indication (and possibly the only one) of where someone in distress may be located.



Brian Richardson has written a system for the crew to log their hours when on the water or even conducting boat maintenance. Called MaRIO Jnr, it replaces the current iPad app and has been specked by Howard Faulks in liaison with OPSO Laurie Nolan.

But Howard has been busier than that as the Unit's representative on the MRNSW IT Steering Committee, HCC Regional IT Committee and co-ordinating the replies to various specification reviews for new releases of Otter, Seahawk, OpenCPN and the soon to be updated Mobile Phone Logon App. And somehow he still has time to pass assessment and stand duty as Marine Radio Operator (MRO) and Crew. A busy workload for any of our volunteers.

Lee and Howard are also testing the introduction of recently purchased radio headsets into the Comms Centre.

New internet based weather reporting software, WebEFB, has been introduced by the Bureau of Meteorology for the 9:00am and 3:00pm readings provided by MRPS. Before the upgrade to a 21<sup>st</sup> Century tool, MROs had to combat a DOS based Electronic Field Book (EFB) requiring the use of keyboard up and down arrows, tabs, etc which took quite a time to

master. Aaah, progress!!

Here's hoping for a quick return to "normal" but in the mean time, thanks to all who are still on standby for "**Saving Lives on the Water**".

**Col Couper**



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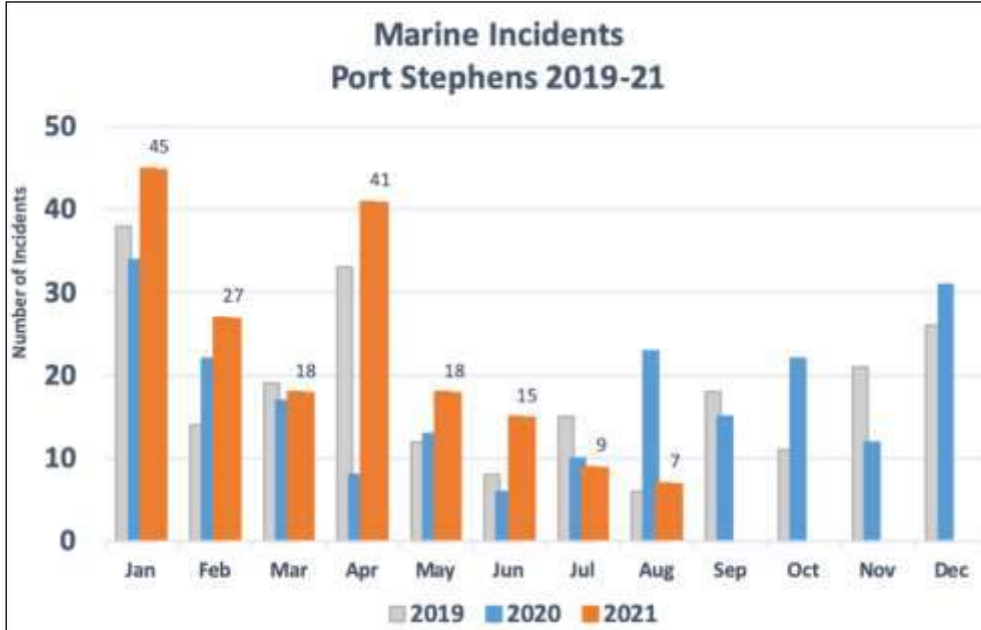
# OPERATIONS

## OPERATIONS OFFICER

In July there were nine incidents, with our RVs

responding on only three occasions to assist boaters with engine issues on inside waters. One was a long job retrieving a runabout from the Myall River Camp, taking it to Soldiers Point.

There was a PAN PAN which was successfully resolved with no loss of vessels or life – thankfully. A group of five kayakers had ventured out in very poor weather conditions – it was blowing very strongly from the west, and the Bay was badly chopped up. Three of the kayakers returned to their starting point, but there was concern for two of their party that had not re-appeared. A call was made to our Radio Base, and a



Following the high activity in April, the last few months have seen reduced boating in Port Stephens, due both to the COVID lockdowns and the fact that it is winter. Add to that the high winds that we have been having and it has definitely been unpleasant on the water for much of the last couple of months.

Even so, there are some hardy souls who brave the conditions and the risks, and whenever there are people on the water, there is the possibility that things can go wrong.

In May there were 18 Marine Incidents handled by the Communications Centre, of which two were overdue vessels (eventually resolved), one was a MAYDAY, and five were SARs (Search and Rescues). Our Rescue Vessels attended five incidents, while Maritime and LT (Lemon Tree) 30 attended four others. Seven other incidents did not require a Rescue Vessel (RV) response.

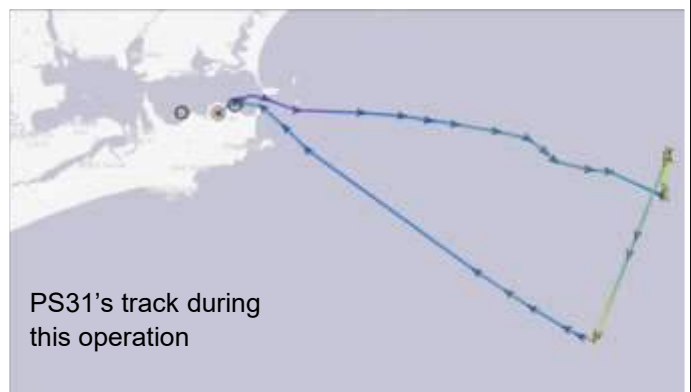
In June there were 15 Marine Incidents, of which one was a MAYDAY (see below), and five were offshore SARs. Our RVs attended five incidents, while the PS Water Police attended four times.

The MAYDAY was as a result of a Kayak overturning near Lemon Tree Passage, with the tragic loss of a child's life. Rescue Vessels from both Port Stephens and Lemon Tree Passage were tasked to assist PSWP who were already on scene. Both Marine Rescue (MR) vessels were stood down before arriving at the scene, following advice from the Water Police (WP) that the child had been found.

Such a tragic incident is a reminder that when accidents happen, water can be very unforgiving. Marine Rescue urges all who participate in boating activities on our beautiful waterways to PLEASE TAKE CARE. We are there to assist you if we can, but it is better if you don't get into trouble in the first place.

PAN PAN was declared owing to gale force winds and rough conditions. An "All Ships" call was put out, and Maritime 1 responded. The Kayak party subsequently advised one kayaker had been recovered but had received a distress call with Lat & Long from the other's smart watch. Shortly after, a member of the public reported that the other had made it to Nelson Bay Beach and was being attended to by police. Maritime 1 and PS31, which was standing by, were stood down.

August has also been a slow month, however our Boat Crew have responded four times out of a total seven incidents. Three of these were off-shore SARs, requiring two tows from near Broughton Island. Another was a frustratingly unsuccessful search for a wayward tender which had come from a yacht in Camden Haven, and was drifting in the southerly current. A passing bulk carrier had spotted the unmanned 3-metre tender about 23 nautical miles (more than 40 Km) off Port Stephens, and radioed the position and drift pattern to Newcastle Radio. MRPS was tasked to search for, and retrieve if possible, the tender which was obviously a navigation risk to shipping in the area. PS31 responded by proceeding to the LKP (Last Known Position), and searching down the



*(Continued on page 11)*

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## OPERATIONS .....

(Continued from page 9)

notified drift line. Unfortunately, after over two hours of searching the tender was not spotted, and the search was abandoned due to failing light.

### HAPPENINGS

*Young Endeavour*



Port Stephens has had visits from numerous Tall Ships over the last few months. The barquentine **Young**

**Endeavour** made one of its regular visits on its way up the coast with a shipload of young trainees. She only stayed one

*Yvonneke*



*Ruach*

night but she's always welcome. Another vessel was the **Yvonneke**, a beautiful 22m Brigantine/Topsail Schooner built in 1975. She's a Ferro-cement hull and her masts are made out of spruce and hemlock with a traditional rig of duradon sails, weighing a total of almost 80 tonnes. Yvonneke stayed for a few nights, with the crew and guests enjoying some of the Port's famous eateries and entertainment venues.

One beautiful vessel that is currently in port (as at 25 August) is the Ruach, a 37-metre Schooner registered in the Cook Islands. It is on an extended stay in Port Stephens during the current COVID lockdown. We are very lucky to have such beautiful ships visit us here in PS.

### PERSONNEL

Boat Crew member Mark Kelly has taken over the role of Boat Officer, responsible for keeping our RVs in tip-top condition and ever-ready to respond whenever needed. This is of course a vital task in the overall Operational Readiness for any MR Unit – the boats are our "Lifeblood" in providing the sometimes-critical assistance to vessels in distress on our beautiful (but often extremely

dangerous) waters of Port Stephens.

Congratulations to Anthony Batchler and Murray O'Dea who have successfully completed their Operational Assessments for Leading Crew. This is a very significant step in the boat crew ratings, and clears the way for both of them to commence training as Coxswain. Boat operations rely heavily on the abilities of all Boat Crew, but especially on those that have achieved the higher ratings. Murray and Anthony are welcome additions to these ranks.

Three Boat Crew Trainees have also recently been assessed as fully



*Howard (above) and Tony (below) successfully completing crew assessment rating.*



competent and capable to handle the sometimes-gruelling tasks on board our RVs. Congratulations to Brad, Tony and Howard who are very welcome additions to our MR Crew. This brings our Crew numbers to 18, with five Active Duty

Skippers, plus 13 qualified crew.

A further batch of six new Crew Trainees are just in the process of commencing their training for Boat Crew, and we wish them luck and speedy learning in the coming months. Some of them have external Maritime and Navy qualifications which will facilitate their progress through the MR Crew Training regime, and rapidly add to our "bank" of maritime skills.

### BOATS

Both PS30 and PS31 remain fully operational. This does not just happen automatically – we have a dedicated team of Boat Maintenance members who spend hours every week going over every aspect of our boats to ensure that nothing is out of order. Many thanks to Boat Manager Mark, and Bill, Ian, Rex, Bob and quite a few of

(Continued on page 13)



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## OPERATIONS ... AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

(Continued from page 11)

our Boat Crew who also lend a hand.

### COMMUNICATIONS CENTRE

Congratulations to a number of newly qualified MROs (Marine Radio Operators) and WOs (Watch Officers) who have worked long and hard under difficult circumstances to complete all the necessary book learning and practical experience to pass their Operational Assessments.

Under COVID restrictions, there have been significant changes in the way that we operate in the Radio Room. Sadly we are no longer able to allow visitors into our Communications Centre, due to the limited space and the need for social distancing. In fact, for the last 6-8 weeks we have not even been allowing trainee Radio Operators into the room, based on some stricter Lockdown guidelines from MR Headquarters.

Thankfully, as a result of the low numbers of cases

reported in the Port Stephens region, we have recently re-introduced Trainees in the Comms Centre. This had become necessary because of natural attrition – we need to keep the numbers up so that the can continue to serve the public of Port Stephens.



**Laurie Nolan**

Jeff Dallinger (left) and John Lee (below) receiving their MRO slides.



### COMMUNITY RELATIONS OFFICER

#### Training and Assessment Suspended

Training at Marine Rescue Port Stephens has been severely impacted by Level 2 and Level 3 COVID restrictions. An aggressive training program for new volunteers, both on our boats and in our Communications Centre, has always been considered vital to the sustainability of our Port Stephens unit. Currently all local training and assessment activities at Marine Rescue Port Stephens have been suspended. Due to the physical size of our Communications Centre we had to restrict the size of our crews on shift to just two members (in order to comply with the four square metre rule) where we would



normally also have a Trainee on shift actively engaged in on-job-training.

Luckily due to the extremely low Covid cases in the Port Stephens area we have been able to reinstate the trainees into the Communications Centre.

Marine Rescue Port Stephens operates a hands-on

mentoring program currently comprised of 18 mentors. We have developed a unit specific Mentor Guide manual so that all mentors know their responsibilities to their mentees and to the program. Although face-to-face mentoring is difficult at present, contact is still being made through phone and Zoom meetings. We currently have

18 Marine Radio Operator trainees

Luckily, just before we went to Level 3 restrictions on 5 August, we were able to assess and rate three Watch Officers, four MROs and three Crew members. We are fortunate to have four Cert 4 Trainers and Assessors on staff. We currently have three MROs, three Watch Officers, six Crew and five Leading Crew working toward their

operational assessments. With some of them qualifying as mentioned in the previous report.

This winter our numbers in the Communications Centre were reduced significantly by retirement and illness. Our unit currently has 53 members supporting the Communications Centre 24 hours per day. Hopefully, our restrictions will end soon and we can return to our normal training and assessment schedule to continue replenishing our skilled and rated membership.

Please comply with Maritime COVID-19 rules while on the water. The latest updates can be found here:

<https://roads-waterways.transport.nsw.gov.au/maritime/covid-19-update.html>

**Will Scott**

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## FACILITIES

### FACILITIES OFFICER

Since the transfer of responsibility for the management of the Nelson Head Reserve to Marine Rescue NSW a couple of years ago the Reserve has been managed by a management committee. The decision has now been made to incorporate this function fully into Marine Rescue Port Stephens by the formation of a Facilities Group. This Group will manage the maintenance and refurbishment of the buildings and grounds at Nelson Head and also manage the operation of the Cottage/Museum including tours and weddings.

This new structure brings together all of the functions necessary for the efficient and successful management of the whole Nelson Head site.



### The current projects being handled are:

#### Bunker:

The refurbishment of the bunker is continuing, albeit slowly, given the current lockdown provisions. Discussions with the builder and structural engineer have finalised the best method of stabilising the slab and we are now working towards getting final costs to carry out this work.

#### Public Car Park:

The geotechnical engineer has carried out his inspection of the subsidence at the end of the car park and has prepared a report detailing his recommendations for the required repairs. This report has gone to the structural engineer to determine the most efficient method of replacing the ageing retaining wall.

#### Cottage Light Room:

Lamp reflectors have been ordered from a new supplier and we are hoping for delivery within the next couple of weeks. Once they are delivered we can move to the final stage of manufacture of the lamp bases. The perspex screen has been installed to protect the lamps and the artefacts relating to the original display.

#### Painting:

The great majority of painting required around the site has been completed with the Cottage/Museum and Tea Rooms all looking shiny and new. The Command Centre, garage and toilet block have also been repainted, together with a number of ramps and the Cottage verandahs.



#### Clean up:

Our maintenance Team has done a great job in cleaning up a number of areas, including the garage and workshop and work has started on cleaning out the bunker. There is still a lot of work to do but the team has made a good start and this work will continue, lockdown restrictions notwithstanding.

**John Reid**



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## BIRDS AROUND PORT STEPHENS

### GREAT CORMORANT (PHALACROCORAX CARBO) AND LITTLE BLACK CORMORANT (PHALACROCORAX SULCIROSTRIS)

Of the four cormorant species present in Port Stephens, the two black cormorants, the Great Cormorant and the Little Black Cormorant are the least numerous.

**The Great Cormorant** is the largest of the four



species and is 80-85 cm long with a wingspan of 1.3-1.5 m. It is almost entirely black in plumage, apart from a yellow face and a white chin and throat. The bill is grey

with a small hook at the end and the legs and feet are black. Young birds resemble the adults but are more dusky-brown.

Great Cormorants are probably the most widespread member of the cormorant family and occur world-wide. They occur throughout most areas of Australia but tend to be more numerous in the south-east and south-west. Although it has a preference for extensive areas of permanent freshwater, the Great Cormorant is often observed on coastal inlets and estuaries.

Great Cormorants are sociable birds and around breeding time form colonies that may contain several thousand birds. However, breeding can occur at any time depending on food supply. Both sexes build the nest, which is a large structure of sticks placed in a low tree or on the ground when nesting on islands. Both parents incubate the eggs and care for the young.

**The Little Black Cormorants** is 55-65 cm long and has



a wingspan of 1.0 m. It is a small, slim, totally black cormorant with a greenish sheen to the back and a slender grey hooked bill. In the breeding season, adults have fine white flecks on the head and neck and the green tinge becomes more bronze.

Little Cormorants congregate and sometimes forage in larger flocks than other cormorant species and fly in V-

shaped formations. They have been recorded surrounding schools of fish in open water, and forming a line across marine inlets to catch fish washed out on ebbing tides.

They are mainly found in freshwater wetlands, but are also found on sheltered coastal waters, and can use relatively small, deep water bodies. The Little Black Cormorant nests colonially, often on the fringes of heron or ibis colonies, building large stick nests in the fork of a tree or on the ground. Both sexes share nest-building, incubation and feeding of the young.

All cormorant species when feeding, dive and swim underwater with powerful webbed feet, locating their prey visually and seizing it in their hooked bill. They possess special nictitating membranes that cover and protect the eyes when underwater. Cormorants return to the surface to consume their catch. Prey is generally caught "side-on" and they are expert at tossing it into the

air and catching again, to allow it to be swallowed head first. Smaller cormorant species can stay underwater for 30-40 seconds, while larger cormorants can stay submerged for up to a minute.



Regular surveys of shorebirds in Port

Stephens have recorded 2-475 Little Black Cormorants and 7-55 Great Cormorants. Similar variation has been recorded in the numbers of Little Pied Cormorant and the Pied Cormorant. This variation is to some degree influenced by seasonal climatic conditions in Australia. During prolonged dry periods, cormorants will tend to congregate in coastal areas, particularly estuaries. However when significant inland rain events occur, cormorants and other shore birds head inland towards the rivers, swamps and lakes where they will breed as long as the food supply lasts, returning again to the coast as the next dry spell sets in. In this way, Port Stephens with its extensive protected shallow waterways, varied shoreline, reliable food supply, tidal mudflats and undisturbed islands becomes an ideal dry season refuge for many Australian shorebirds.

Around Port Stephens Great Cormorants are seen more frequently feeding along the coast rather than inside the bay and accurate numbers have not been determined. Towards sunset, Great Cormorants can be seen flying along the shoreline towards a large overnight roosting site on rocks at the south end of Cabbage Tree Island.

No cormorants are listed as threatened species in Australia.

**Neil Fraser  
Twitcher**

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## RFS LIAISON HUNTER VALLEY

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

Due to the current COVID-19 lockdown, as of time of publication, the HV Fire Control Centre is closed and only open for emergency operation.

The RFS is urging land managers and property owners to carefully consider conditions before burning off and to make sure they notify fire agencies and neighbours. The below was released via email and through local channels:

*Acting District Manager, Inspector Ken Hepplewhite said escaped fires pose a very real threat to both people and property.*

*"Problems occur when people do not adequately supervise fires or underestimate the conditions," Inspector Hepplewhite said.*

*"Already this month the RFS have seen more than 40 escaped private burns so residents must consider both the current and forecast weather conditions before lighting up.*

*"Also, you must notify your neighbours and local fire authority at least 24 hours before starting your burn."*

Unfortunately, a number of landholders didn't get the message and notify HV RFS of their intentions, meaning that brigades were sent out needlessly.

The Bush Fire Danger Period (BFDP) is due to commence on 1 September for Muswellbrook and Singleton Local Government Areas, meaning landholders must obtain a free Fire Permit before lighting up.

To notify of the intent to burn, they must use the online burn notification tool at [www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/notify](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/notify) or contact HV RFS.

A supervised Hazard Reduction Burn at 750 DeBeyers Rd, Polkoben on 16 August was notified on the HV RFS Facebook page. Though this was in the Lower Hunter district and landholders in the vicinity were notified by letter, it is near the border of the two and it alerted landowners around Broke and Branxton that they may see smoke in the area.



Supervised Hazard Reduction

BHP conducted a similar burn at the Mt Arthur coal mine's 250 hectare bio-diversity site at Muswellbrook on 31 July. A certificate was granted to BHP by the RFS with appropriate conditions attached. One to keep a very close eye on the fire as fire + coal = !!!



At 2 a.m. on 4 August, Edinglassie brigade was called out to a car carrier truck that had ploughed into a guardrail at Liddell on the New England Highway. The holed sump of the prime mover leaked oil onto the road which the RFS had to contain before the road could

be opened to traffic. Of course the paging and comms was capably handled by regular overnight WK Peter B. It's not always a fire.

Typical of the co-operation between international firefighting agencies and following a request from the US, the NSW RFS large air tanker, the **Marie Bashir**, left



Richmond airport on 20 July for a 45 day deployment. It assisted with the over 80 wildfires burning 400,000 hectares over 13 States. No doubt the assistance from Canadian and American fire fighters in the catastrophe of the 2019-20 fires here is happily reciprocated.

So if you wonder why they do it, here are members of the Whittingham brigade, near Singleton.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=984546358964672>

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## RFS LIAISON LOWER HUNTER AND GIFT SHOP

### LOWER HUNTER RFS LIAISON

As can be observed from the figures there is an increase in grass fires which is being reinforced by the figures in the latest report.

Sometimes when we are doing night shift we get a call from Fire and Rescue requesting us to send a tanker or tankers to a fire they have attended. The tankers referred to are not the Cat 13 bulk water tankers such as Bolwarra 13, but the normal firefighting appliances that have a 4x4



function, as the Fire and Rescue tankers do not have this capacity. Cat. 7 appliances are great for meet this request as they have the following specifications: 4 x 4 Crew cab with 800 to 1600 capacity water tank on the back.

**Ross Debenham**

The table below reflects the incidents received by MRPS from Hunter Valley and Lower Hunter Districts

Month		Bush/Grass	Structure	CFR	MVA	Car	AFA	Other	Total
May-21	LHRFS	11	2	10	9	10	7	20	69
Jun-21	LHRFS	8	2	9	9	10	2	15	55
Jul-21	LHRFS	18	0	7	9	8	2	17	61
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>LHRFS</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>185</b>
May-21	HVRFS	4	1	2	5	5	1	5	23
Jun-21	HVRFS	3	2	2	2	2	0	3	14
Jul-21	HVRFS	2	1	2	1	1	0	4	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>HVRFS</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>48</b>

## GIFT SHOP

A little bit about us ----- starting from a band of auxiliary volunteers, a small homespun activity opened in the WWII Bunker overlooking the entrance to Port Stephens waterway, selling jams, cakes and handcraft items during the 1980's.

This venture expanded to the current premises and business we enjoy today, servicing the many loyal holiday makers visiting us especially for seasonal shopping i.e. Christmas etc.

Our volunteer Gift Shop ladies are a dedicated team, enjoying their contribution to the success of the Unit and proud of the well-run enterprise and financial success that it is, bringing in much needed funding toward the rescue vessels maintenance and fuel supply, thus 'saving lives on the water'.



Denise Olsen, former UC Colin Foote and Sandra Scheuber.

We operate with a Manager, 2 IC. and 28 lady volunteers who are all looking forward to the re-opening and continued success of the shop for many years to come.

Please stay safe.

**Sandra Scheuber**  
**Manager**

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## RANI: THE LOSS OF AN AUSTRALIAN MARITIME ICON

A mystery unfolded in early January 1959 when a



wrecked yacht was located on Mungo Beach about 20 km northeast of Port Stephens. The wooden yacht was found lying on its side between high and low water. The hull appeared to have been holed by jagged rocks offshore and then suffered further extensively damage by the pounding of heavy seas as it lay stranded on the beach. The mast was snapped but with one sail still rigged, and the ships gear was strewn along the length of the beach. But there was no trace of her four-man crew.

The yacht was Rani, a 35 foot wooden cutter, built at Speers Point, Lake Macquarie by well-known boat-builder Les Steel in 1936. Rani had a reputation of being a very sturdy vessel, so it was somewhat of a mystery as to how it ended up abandoned and wrecked on a deserted local beach. At the time she was wrecked, Rani was owned by Harry Quinn who had taken three friends on a fishing trip from Sydney to the Port Stephens area. When inspected by Police, it was noted that Rani's rudder was lashed and the mainsail had been furled. The yacht's fiberglass lifeboat and some food were unaccounted for and three lifebelts were missing. Had the crew been forced to abandon the yacht and were adrift at sea, or were they sheltering somewhere?

A search was initiated with a Dakota aircraft from Williamtown and 30 fishing vessels, including trawlers from Port Stephens, searching for survivors. None were found. These events unfolded well before the formation

of the Port Stephens Division of the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol in 1982. The air-sea search was led by Police Sergeant Duncan McLeod, skipper of the police rescue launch Ansett, based in Newcastle. On the advice of local fisherman, McLeod calculated that the yacht had most likely drifted north prior to being wrecked on Mungo Beach. By backtracking the drift line, he determined it had possibly drifted from nearby Broughton Island. An aerial search eventually located the four men on the island but conditions were so severe they had to wait another four days before they could be rescued by boat. (BOM records show an East Coast Low was present on the NSW Mid-north coast 3-5 January, 1959)

After the relieved crew were recovered, they recounted how whilst fishing north of Port Stephens, a storm blew up and skipper Harry Quinn decided to anchor off deserted, wind-swept Broughton Island. The four went ashore to spend a more comfortable night in an old fisherman's hut. Unfortunately Rani dragged its anchor overnight and the following morning the crew spied her stranded on the distant shore. They heard a plane circling overhead and lit a signal fire but failed to attract attention. Rani was a



complete write-off and was subsequently offered at auction. Only the motor and fittings were considered salvageable. The hull was beyond repair.

The yacht's demise marked the loss of an iconic piece of Australian maritime history. Rani was designed by Sydney naval architect and boat builder Arthur Barber and built in 1936 by Les Steel at Speers Point for local Lake Macquarie doctor Rowland Pittar at a cost of £616. When sails and engine were fitted the cost was probably around £800. The yacht was initially named Doris after the doctor's wife. Shortly after World War II, Dr. Pittar sold the yacht to Captain John Illingworth RN who changed the name to Rani. Illingworth was the British Fleet Engineer Officer at the Garden Island naval dockyard during the war and was a noted English yachtsman and yacht designer in peace time.

*(Continued on page 24)*

## RANI: THE LOSS OF AN AUSTRALIAN MARITIME ICON

(Continued from page 23)



In late 1945, Jack Earl, a marine artist, planned a leisurely cruise from Sydney to Hobart on the family ketch *Kathleen* (above), leaving on Boxing Day. A small group of other Sydney yacht owners decided to accompany Earl and when they asked Illingworth, a legendary British offshore yachtsman if he wanted to take part, he replied, "Yes, I will if you make it a race". Illingworth convinced the fledgling Cruising Yacht Club of Australia to host the race and eventually nine yachts entered. This was the beginning of arguably the world's greatest ocean race, the now internationally famous Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race.

When Illingworth decided to compete in the race in 1945, he didn't have a yacht or a crew. He quickly looked around and found a suitable wooden vessel anchored at Pittwater, then named *Maharani*, after a Hindu queen. Illingworth shortened the name to *Rani* and he and some of his subordinate naval officers from Garden Island, who he had co-opted as crew, hurriedly prepared her for the race.

Of the nine yachts that started in the race, eight were Australian crews and *Rani*, skippered by Illingworth was classed as a British entry. At 36 feet, *Rani* was the smallest of the entries. The crew (pictured above) were Capt. John Illingworth (RN) skipper and owner, Lt. Ray Richmond (RN), Lt. John Hoggard (RN), Capt. Ken Vaughan (AIF), Bill Mews (RNVR) and local amateur yachtsmen Norman Hudson and Geoff Colohan.

By today's standards, safety for the nine entrants was almost non-existent. There were no life rafts, no rescue ships or helicopters and no way of knowing your position

relative to other entrants. Radios were not compulsory.

*Rani* had one on loan from a Royal Navy aircraft carrier but two valves burned out before the start. Ray Richmond, one of Illingworth's subordinate officers at Garden Island described how, following the midday race start, *Rani* took a wide sweep to the south-east to gain full advantage of winds and currents. "Illingworth was a master tactician; a keen ocean racer. We plotted our position every mile of the way. Every half hour of every watch we had to put down our estimated position, which Illingworth or the navigator checked on the course".

On the afternoon of the second day of the race, a 'southerly buster' hit the fleet, and developed into a Force 9 gale. (The Beaufort scale classifies a Force 9 gale as having winds of 41-45 knots and seas of 7-10 m.) All yachts except *Rani* hove to or ran for shelter. *Archina* retired. Richmond describes sailing vertically down waves up to 50 feet high. During the storm *Rani* ripped her mainsail, but Norman Hudson proceeded to repair it. When finished, Hudson had hand-sewn 175 feet of canvas seams. As *Rani* speared through the waves, water started cascading into the cabin after deck caulking came out. A blanket was torn into strips and forced between the gaps. More problems arose during the storm when the bilge pumps failed. They had become clogged with the paper labels that had washed off tins of food and



bottles stored below the floor of the cabin. Subsequent meals from the unlabelled supplies became a gastronomical lottery. The storm lasted for 36 hours.

Once the mainsail was repaired, *Rani* continued on across eastern Bass Strait to the Tasmanian east coast. Following the storm, neither race officials nor the RAAF had been able to make contact with the yacht by radio or in search sweeps off the NSW South Coast. The storm was followed by an inevitable calm and the

voyage south dragged on and on. An RAAF Catalina eventually sighted *Rani* entering Storm Bay. She had not been sighted for four days and at one stage fears were held for her safety.

Later that night, as *Rani* sailed up the Derwent River the crew sighted the headlights of a car flashing out in Morse code: "Are you *Rani*?" "Yes, we're *Rani*," they replied. Then a further message flashed from ashore: "Thank God you're safe." As a tender came alongside, Illingworth

(Continued on page 25)



## RANI: THE LOSS OF AN AUSTRALIAN MARITIME ICON

(Continued from page 24)

asked "How many boats are in?" He was stunned to be told "You're the first!" He was convinced, as they were the smallest boat, they would be 'Tail-end-Charlie.' *Rani* (right) crossed the finishing line at 2.22 am on 2 January 1946. At the time, the race favorite, *Winston Churchill*, was over 100 nautical miles astern.

*Rani* completed the 630 nautical mile race in 6 days, 14 hours and 22 minutes at an average speed of 4 knots. This compares with the current line record holder *LDV Comanche* (below) which in 2017, finished in 31 hours, 15 minutes and 24 seconds, at an average



speed of 20 knots. *Rani* was also the winner on handicap with a time of 4 days, 9 hours and 38 minutes. She crossed the finish line over 17 hours ahead of *Winston Churchill* (right) which finished in 7 days, 7 hours and 38 minutes. *Rani* remains the smallest yacht ever to take line honours in the 75 years of the race, and is one of only six boats to have taken the double of line and overall handicap honours. Another record was established in that first race by the yacht *Wayfarer* (right) which took 11 days, 6 hours and 20 minutes to complete the passage. This still stands as the slowest passage in the blue-water event. The crew had anchored en route at Port Arthur to enjoy a dinner of roast pork and crayfish.

John Illingworth sold *Rani* in the late 1940s and in 1951 the yacht was



returned to Les Steel's boatshed at Speers Point for an extensive refit costing £1,335, more than twice the original build cost. Les Steel and his son Barry are also remembered for having built two other Sydney Hobart race winning yachts, *Struen Marie* which won in 1951 and *Rival* which won in 1961.

*Rani* (below) only competed in one Sydney Hobart Yacht Race. Following her win under the prevailing conditions and the difficulties she encountered, she was likely thought of as indestructible when racing at sea. However, to be lost as a result of a poor mooring decision was an undeserved fate for the mighty little cutter. Her win was a remarkable feat and earned John Illingworth the well-

deserved title of 'father of modern ocean racing in Australia.'

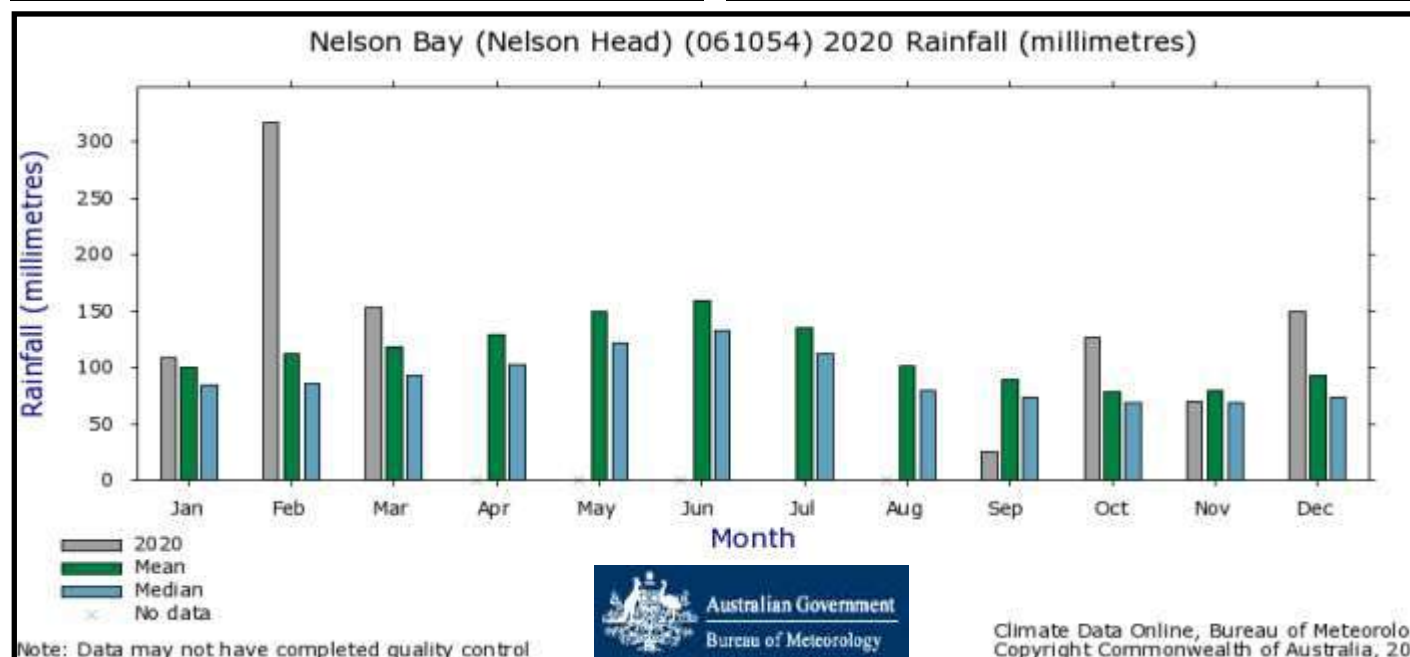


Sources for this article were online publications from the Newcastle Herald, Sail World, Grand Pacific Tours and the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia.

Neil Fraser

## PORT STEPHENS WEATHER

Nelson Bay, NSW - July 2021					Nelson Bay, NSW - August 2021				
Date	Day	Temps °C		Rain	Date	Day	Temps °C		Rain
		Min	Max				Min	Max	
1	Th		18	0	1	Su	10.4	26.5	0
2	Fr	12.5	19.8	1.4	2	Mo	11.2	20.2	2.2
3	Sa	11.5	18	0	3	Tu	11.8	20.6	1.4
4	Su	9.5	15.6	0	4	We	11	15.5	0.1
5	Mo	6.5	15	0	5	Th	10.5	18.6	0
6	Tu	7.6	15.4	0	6	Fr	10.6	18.2	0
7	We	8.5	17.6	0	7	Sa	9	17.5	0
8	Th	9.1	17.5	0.2	8	Su	9.2	16.2	0.6
9	Fr	10	13	2.2	9	Mo	10.1	19.3	0
10	Sa	9	13.2	32.7	10	Tu	11.6	20.2	0
11	Su	10	17.2	46	11	We	11.5	24.9	0
12	Mo	9.5	18.1	1.5	12	Th	13.4	19.5	0
13	Tu	9.5	19	0.3	13	Fr	9.8	19	0
14	We	10.3	15.6	0.2	14	Sa	10	20	0.2
15	Th	11.6	20.2	0	15	Su	10.5	21.2	0
16	Fr	11.8	19.5	0	16	Mo	11.5	21	0
17	Sa	11	15.6	1	17	Tu	10.1	17.9	0
18	Su	12	17.2	0	18	We	8.9	17.8	0.3
19	Mo	9.4	15.7	0	19	Th	10.7	20.7	0
20	Tu	9.5	15.8	0	20	Fr	12	22	0
21	We	10.5	14.2	0	21	Sa	12.9	20.8	0.8
22	Th	8	17.5	0	22	Su	12	23	0
23	Fr	8	19.5	0.2	23	Mo	15.5	23.1	0
24	Sa	11	18.2	0	24	Tu	10.9	13.6	18.2
25	Su	11.9	15.3	0	25	We	8.8	16.1	16.2
26	Mo	11.5	18.6	0	26	Th	9.5	16.7	0
27	Tu	9.8	21.2	0	27	Fr	10.6	18.2	0
28	We	9.8	22.5	0	28	Sa	10.5	17	0
29	Th	12	17.5	0.1	29	Su	9.3	20.1	0
30	Fr	8.1	18.4	0	30	Mo	11	19.5	0.3
31	Sa	7.6	20.1	0	31	Tu	10.9		0
Statistics for July 2021					Statistics for August 2021				
Mean		9.9	17.4		Mean		10.8	19.5	
Lowest		6.5	13	0	Lowest		8.8	13.6	
Highest		12.5	22.5	46	Highest		15.5	26.5	18.2
Total				85.8	Total				40.3





# 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*:**

Colin Couper, Ross Debenham, Neil Fraser, Laurie Nolan, John Reid, Will Scott, Ben van der Wijngaart. Other photos by Colin Couper, Ross Debenham, Clinton J Down, Laurie Nolan, Murray O'Dea. You too can become a contributor and you will be most welcome. See inside front cover.

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