

DECEMBER 2015: MANGAWHAI HEADS VLS



# RESCUE OF THE MONTH

## RECOGNISING OUTSTANDING RESCUES

NORTHERN WINNER

**Date: December 15 2015**

**Location: Mangawhai Heads and Harbour**

**Lifeguards involved: Murray Dix and Mark Vercoe**

*In it for life*

During the early hours of December 15, SurfCom was alerted to a vessel in distress at the Whangarei Heads harbour mouth area. The information was limited but the vessel was believed to be an 8.8m yacht and the skipper, the sole occupant, had become stuck on the rocks.

Coastguard initiated an extensive search but the skipper, and the yacht, couldn't be located. At around 3.30am, Ruakaka, Waipu Cove and Mangawhai Heads callout squads were tasked to search the area between Bream Head and Bream Tail.

Meanwhile, the skipper had abandoned his yacht for a small life raft and wasn't wearing a lifejacket.

Mangawhai Heads volunteer lifeguards Murray Dix and Mark Vercoe responded immediately. Vercoe drove his vehicle along Mangawhai Head's beach to search for the grounded yacht and life raft. He spotted the yacht off Head Rock and notified Dix of its whereabouts. Dix had then launched the MHVLS Sea Rider Rescue Boat and collected Vercoe and started the search for the missing man.

The lifeguards searched for some time and could not locate the man and it was only on a last scan out to sea that Vercoe noticed a white flash around one kilometre offshore. They had located the missing man in his small inflatable life raft.

He was cold and very wet, due to having entered the water on a number of occasions, only wearing a shirt and boxers. Dix wrapped the man in his warm jacket and they returned him to shore where the local Police Constable comforted the man while they waited for the ambulance to transport him to Whangarei Hospital.

Later that morning, Dix and Vercoe successfully salvaged the 29ft vessel off Head Rock and, with the assistance of the local Harbour Master, towed the damaged vessel into Mangawhai Harbour.

It was extremely lucky that the lifeguards spotted the man in the pitch black. The lifeguards demonstrated their advanced Search and Rescue skills, and knowledge of the area. If they hadn't found him, the man risked spending another few hours stranded until sunrise.