



RESCUE OF THE MONTH

Recognising Outstanding Rescues

DECEMBER: Gisborne ECOS



DATE: December 24, 2018

LOCATION: Monowai Reef, Whangara Beach, Gisborne

SURF LIFEGUARDS: Justin Martin, Matt Kemp, Andrew Shelton, Alan Thorpe

On Christmas Eve, the Gisborne Call Out Squad (ECOS) was mobilised to perform a daring rescue of passengers on a private boat in massive storm waves off the coast of Gisborne.

Having only been formed earlier in 2018, the Gisborne ECOS was tasked by Police to help rescue a couple from their 12-metre boat, called Mazurka, after a mayday call in the early afternoon. So, with the help of two lifeguard coordinators on the beach at Wainui SLSC, the crew launched two IRBs with four crew. With deteriorating conditions, the rescue was "risky" and relied upon the skills and expertise of the highly-experienced crew who were Justin Martin, Matt Kemp, Andrew Shelton and Alan Thorpe.

Unfortunately, it was a bad day for the two passengers on the boat when its anchor line failed, followed by its engine, leaving only idling power. To make matters worse, the Mazurka was being thrown around by the rough seas with waves as high as four meters and was drifting to nearby Monowai Reef at Whangara Beach, north of Gisborne. After receiving the mayday call, Police tasked both this crew of surf lifeguards and the local Coastguard crew to help rescue the stranded boat and its passengers.

The team was quickly put together and within a short timeframe, the two IRBs were headed for the stricken boat through the "treacherous" and "incredibly horrendous" waters. The two IRBs were the first to reach the Mazurka, with Thorpe bravely jumping into the water and boarding the heavily pitching boat to help the young Scottish couple on board.

They needed to get the 23-year-old woman off the Mazurka and back to safety, but the sea was too rough to transfer her directly into the IRB from the boat. So, Thorpe swam her back to the IRB which then took her back to shore.

The conditions had continued to worsen through the afternoon, and darkness was creeping in early because of the storm. At the time of the rescue, one of the squad members said "when we turned to go home, I could barely see land because of the swells, the sea mist and rain."

Kemp and Thorpe stayed in their IRB next to the Mazurka to provide support to its skipper until the Gisborne Coastguard boat arrived to take control of the vessel and relieve the skipper, meaning he too could disembark the boat. Once the Coastguard were able to take control of the Mazurka, the 32-year-old man who had been skippering it, was transferred onto the remaining IRB and Kemp drove him back to his wife on the beach. The Coastguard crew then began towing the Mazurka to Eastland Port where it was able to stay over Christmas.

The potential for major environmental damage was also significant, with the boat fully laden with diesel and heading for the reef. Being able to work so effectively with the Coastguard to ensure the safety of the people on board and remove the boat from the dangerous situation, meant both human lives were saved and a potentially major environmental disaster averted.

At the time of the incident, Constable Andrew Trafford of Tolaga Bay Police told the Gisborne Herald that it was a "truly amazing rescue." "These guys were all dragged away from their families the day before Christmas to put their own lives at risk to save the lives of others. They worked tirelessly all afternoon and into the evening.

"It was a great result and could have very easily ended up as a double tragedy," he added.

So – not only did the four lifeguards from the Gisborne ECOS help avoid an environmental disaster, they also saved two lives. Without their quick yet expert response, it would have been a tragic start to Christmas for those families.



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