



RESCUE OF THE MONTH



CLUB: Taranaki Emergency Call-Out Squad
SURF LIFEGUARDS: Andy Cronin, Richard Matheson & Scott Nelson

Dusk was falling on the 5th of January, 2021 when the Taranaki Emergency Call-Out Squad (ECOS) received a call from the local Police Search & Rescue team that four teenage girls were stuck on Pararaki Rock off Back Beach.

At low tide, it's possible to walk to Pararaki Rock, but as soon as the tide changed the girls found themselves stranded. Strong currents and impending nightfall loomed, and the girls made the potentially life-saving decision to call for help.

Rescue swimmer Andy Cronin was the first to arrive. He swam through the strong current and found the girls before checking they hadn't sustained any injuries. The group then moved to a more sheltered position and waited for backup to arrive.

Cronin assessed the safest place for the inflatable rescue boat (IRB) to meet the group and radioed ahead to set up a plan. He then guided the girls down to the safest site for the IRB to collect them.

Fellow ECOS members, Scott Nelson and Richard Matheson, arrived a short time later on an IRB.

Two at a time, Cronin guided the girls down the sharp rocks in dim light to a point where they could be transferred. Nelson held the IRB in position despite the strong currents so that Cronin and Matheson could help them in.

Two of the girls were dropped at the beach before Nelson and Matheson navigated through the rough surf back to Cronin and the remaining two girls. Whilst the IRB was away, Cronin climbed back up the rocks to retrieve and again guide down – in even darker conditions – the last two girls.

It was nightfall by the time all members of the group had been returned to safety. Dave Bentley, head of the Taranaki ECOS, says the teamwork displayed in this rescue was key to ensuring a happy outcome.

“The combination of an outgoing tide, a strong westerly wind and nightfall culminated in a number of high risk factors for the four females rescued. The expertise and professionalism of the team to act swiftly...and continue to conduct ongoing risk assessments in challenging surf and light conditions, proved to be an almost certain prevention of a drowning should the females have attempted to swim back in the dangerous dark conditions.”

In it for life