



SURF LIFE SAVING®
NEW ZEALAND

Sharing of Lessons Learnt from a Review of a Surf Life Saving Accident or Incident

Lived it – Learnt from it

Accident Name

Bow jumping accident

Accident Date

18th March, 2023

Location

Northern Region

Description of the accident/incident

Recently, at a Northern Region beach, an Inflatable Rescue Boat (IRB) driver was out on patrol with two 14-year-old female crewpersons. The IRB driver identified that the purpose of their training was to enhance the crewpersons' time and experience in the IRB. The training specifically involved parallel running, ins and outs in the surf, and some patient pick-ups in the surf.

As the crewpersons would exit the IRB (in preparation to be picked up), they started to jump out of the boat. This progressed to what is known as "bow or pontoon jumping", where the crewperson jumps off the front of the boat. Initially, they started this on smaller waves and gradually moved to bigger waves measuring 1.5 to 2-metres. The jumping action occurred at the top of the wave, with the crewperson exiting from the bow at the peak of the wave.

All three crew members described the activity as lots of fun. As their confidence grew, they attempted jumps off higher and higher waves.

On two occasions prior to the accident, both crewpersons had slipped when standing on the pontoon, but they landed on the bottom of the IRB without sustaining any injuries.

During the accident, the crew was approaching a 2-metre unbroken faced wave. The first crewperson was preparing to do her jump, standing on the side of the pontoon. As she went to push off to jump, she slipped and landed heavily, with her head and neck taking the impact on the left (port) side of the bow of the IRB. She landed on the floor of hull of the IRB.

At the same time, the second crewperson lost her balance and fell forward, with her knee landing heavily on the lower back of the first crewperson.

The crew left the injured crewperson in the IRB and transported her to the Surf Club for further assessment. She was then taken to the local hospital for further assessment and treatment.

Outcome

The injured crewperson was diagnosed with contusions and sprained ligaments to her neck and upper back, contusions to her lower back, and a mild concussion. She stayed in the paediatric ward of the hospital for four nights and is currently recovering at home. She is experiencing ongoing concussion symptoms, which are affecting her ability to fully return to school (now six weeks after the accident).

Causes (Immediate, Underlying, Root Cause)

The investigator's findings reinforce why bow jumping (or pontoon jumping) is not a practice that is supported by Surf Life Saving New Zealand (SLSNZ).

The IRB driver was aware that this is an activity not endorsed nor supported by SLSNZ, but the crewpersons were not aware of this position.

The momentum of the IRB coming up the wave, coupled with the first crewperson preparing to jump but slipping and landing heavily within the boat, is what caused her injuries.

Members should always exit the IRB on the left side (port side) and not on waves, unless there is a critical need to do otherwise.

SLSNZ acknowledges and is grateful that the member's injuries were not significantly worse. She could have had a lifelong disability as a result of this accident.

Relevant Photo's

Lessons Learned

Bow Jumping is a very unsafe practice. With immediate effect, this behaviour or activity must stop.

The investigator contacted 10 members from around New Zealand to ask if Bow Jumping (or pontoon jumping) was still a common practice. Most clubs indicated it is no longer an activity that occurs at their clubs, but there are still some clubs that feel it is an activity that is ok.

Corrective Actions and suggestions moving forwards

- SLSNZ to continue to support the injured member through regular contact and Peer Support.
- Be available to support the Surf Club and remind them of the value of doing Operational Risk Assessments.
- Incorporate into the SLSNZ Crew Module that Bow Jumping is not a safe practice and not one that SLSNZ supports.
- A Safety Alert is to be sent to all clubs throughout New Zealand to ensure all members are aware this practice is not supported and communicate the inherent risks associated with this behaviour/action

We are committed to continuous improvement and fostering a no-blame culture. Surf Life Saving New Zealand's plan is to share learnings and examples of decision-making from actual incidents and accidents that our members have experienced, with the goal of preventing avoidable accidents.