



**REPORT INTO THE LOSS OF  
TWO LIVES IN A SMALL  
BOAT CASUALTY IN  
INVER BAY ON THE  
17TH JULY 1995.**

The Marine Casualty Investigation Board was established on the 5<sup>th</sup>, June 2002 under The Merchant Shipping (Investigation of Marine Casualties) Act 2000

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## 1. SYNOPSIS.

- 1.1 On the morning of the 17th July 1995 two men were engaged in salmon netting on the eastern side of Inver Bay between Buncronan Point and Drombeg Point (see Appendix 8.1). Their small open boat was seen in a partially sunken condition at about 0700 by other salmon fishermen in Inver Bay at that time. One body was found floating about 50 yards from the partially sunken boat. The other body was found close inshore about two hours later. There were no witnesses to the sinking.

## 2. FACTUAL INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION OF THE SMALL OPEN BOAT

- 2.1 This fibreglass boat was salvaged. It was not registered and did not bear a name. It was 3.7 metres (12 feet) long and 1.4 metres (4 feet 7 inches) wide. Other than a small compartment forward no reserve buoyancy was provided to counteract flooding and enable the boat to remain afloat in that situation. The equipment on board consisted of two oars and a 9.9 horsepower outboard motor. There was no evidence that equipment of any other description was on board. (See Appendix 8.2)

### 3. EVENTS PRIOR TO THE INCIDENT

#### WEATHER AND TIDAL CONDITIONS

- 3.1 High water was at about 1015hrs. The wind in Donegal Bay at the time of the casualty was from between S and SW force 4/ 5 with a predominant swell from the NW. Inver Bay would have been sheltered from the NW but not from the moderate to fresh S to SW breeze. (See Appendix 8.3)

#### 4. THE INCIDENT

- 4.1 A number of small boats were engaged in salmon netting in Inver Bay on the morning of the 17th July. They had left Eany Fish Farm on the NW side of the bay between 0500hrs and 0600hrs. At about 0600hrs the small boat in question, occupied by Charles Meehan (aged 64) and his nephew Stephen Meehan (aged 20), was seen heading towards the NW side of the bay. At about 0650hrs, the occupants of another boat engaged in salmon netting sighted an object low in the water between Buncronan Port and Drumbeg Point. On closer investigation it was found to be the stem of a boat protruding above the surface in about 10 feet of water about 150 yards offshore. A body was sighted floating about 50 yards inshore from the boat, and on investigation, was found to be that of Mr. Charles Meehan clad in yellow oilskins and waders.

### 5. EVENTS FOLLOWING THE INCIDENT

- 5.1 With the assistance of another small boat the body of Charles Meehan was taken on board. Two more small boats arrived on the scene at the same time. The occupants of the small boats succeeded in lifting the sunken boat in an attempt to find Mr. Stephen Meehan but there was no sign of him. They noted that the petrol tank still apparently connected to the outboard motor was afloat nearby. On lifting it they believe that the outboard motor became detached from the boat. It has since been recovered. Part of a net still alongside the sunken boat was hauled in and one wader was found in the net. Another wader was found in the boat. The sunken boat was lifted, drained and left afloat. The two oars were washed ashore and recovered.
- 5.2 Bundoran inshore lifeboat was launched, a helicopter was tasked and Killybegs Coast and Cliff Rescue Services (CCRS) mobilised. At about 0830hrs the body of Mr. Stephen Meehan was found face down in approximately two feet of water near the Claddagh.
- 5.3 The Bundoran inshore lifeboat, the CCRS rescue boat and R110 helicopter were on the scene from about 0800hrs. The body of Stephen Meehan was airlifted to Eany Fish Farm.
- 5.4 There was no evidence that either of the deceased had been wearing any form of buoyancy aid or lifejacket.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

- 6.1 The use of this small, ill equipped open boat in the open waters of Inver Bay sheltered only from offshore winds was an unsafe practice. Since there was no witnesses to the casualty and no survivors the manner in which the Meehan's boat sank in 10 feet of water some 150 yards offshore is not known. The boat was salvaged in an undamaged condition. Given the weight of the occupants and the outboard engine, any ingress of water leading to a loss of buoyancy would have led to rapid sinking in the absence of reserve buoyancy in the form of watertight compartments or built in buoyancy.
- 6.2 The deceased had no means of attracting attention when they found themselves in difficulties and they had no floatation equipment to assist them remaining afloat when their boat foundered.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

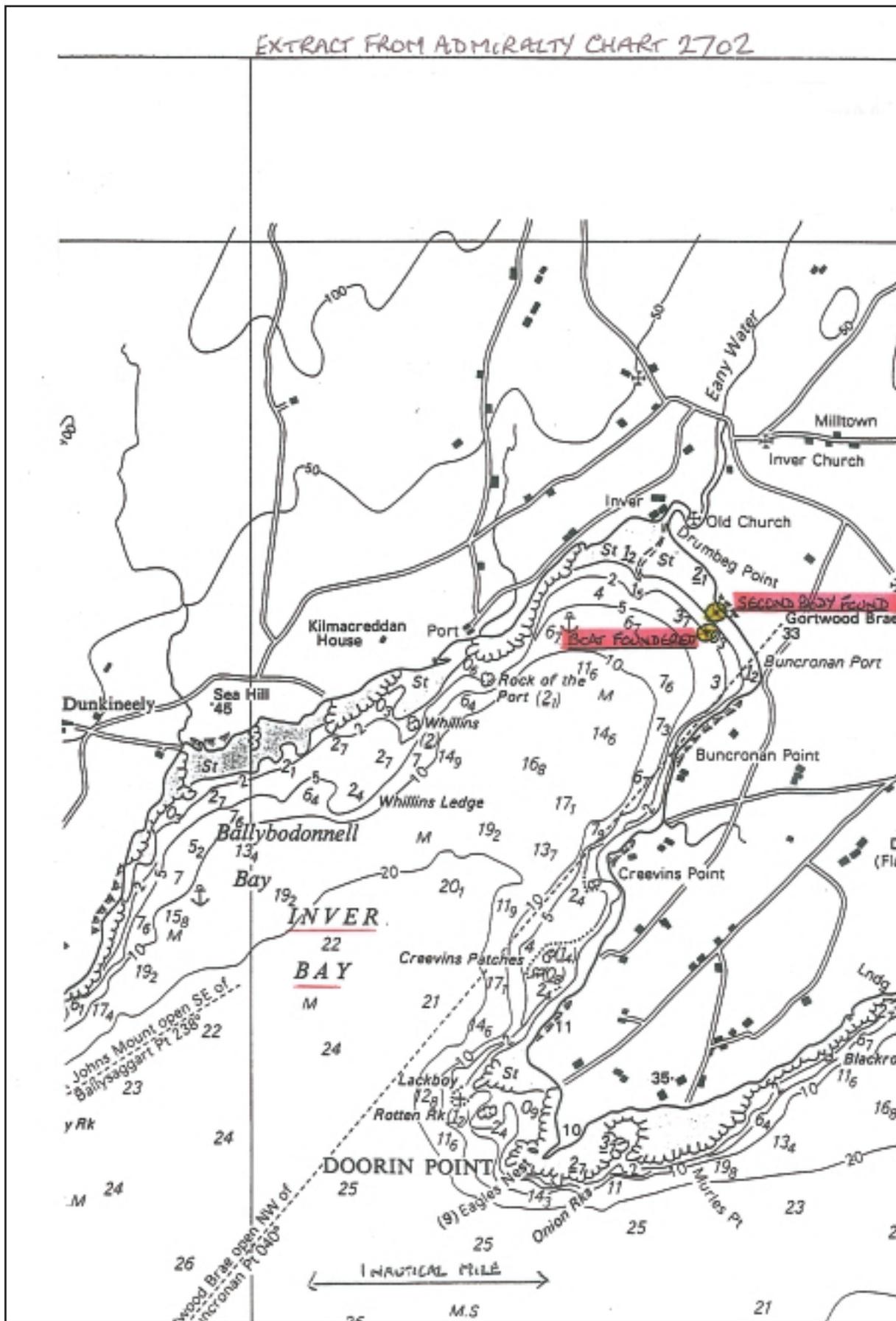
- 7.1 All persons on boats should take all necessary precautions for their own safety and satisfy themselves that all safety devices are on board and in good working order. In particular they should wear an approved lifejacket or buoyancy aid at all times. (See appendix 8.4)
- 7.2 All such vessels should be equipped with adequate means for attracting attention if assistance is needed e.g. flares, buoyant smoke flares, aerosol horns.
- 7.3 Any open boat intended for use in coastal waters, bays, estuaries, large rivers and large lakes should be so constructed as to ensure that it has buoyancy characteristics appropriate to its size and configuration. This will, in general, involve the provision of reserve buoyancy in the form of watertight compartments or built in buoyancy sufficient to overcome the effects of flooding.

**8. APPENDICES**

- 8.1: Map of Eastern side of Inver Bay.
- 8.2: Photograph of the boat.
- 8.3: Met Eireann Weather Report for Inver Bay.
- 8.4: Marine Notice No. 7 of 2002 (Guidance on the selection of Personal Flotation Devices (PFD's) for use on board Fishing Vessels).

# APPENDIX 8.1

8.1: Map of Eastern side of Inver Bay.



8.2: Photograph of the boat.



## 8.3: Met Éireann Weather Report for Inver Bay.



**APPENDIX 8.3**

**MET ÉIREANN**  
*The Irish Meteorological Service*

**Weather Report for Inver Bay (between Doorin Point and St John's Point)  
For the 17<sup>th</sup> July 1995  
00 – 24 hours**

00-06 hours  
Winds: South-west to west Force 1 to 3  
Weather: showers  
Visibility: generally good, poor in showers

06 – 12 hours  
Winds: south-west to west Force 3 to 4  
Weather: showers  
Visibility: good

12 – 18 hours  
Winds: south-west to west Force 3 to 5  
Weather: rain in the later part of the period  
Visibility: moderate to good in rain

18 – 24 hours  
Winds: south-east to south later became south to south-west Force 3 to 5  
Weather: rain and drizzle  
Visibility: moderate to poor



- 8.4: Marine Notice No. 7 of 2002 (Guidance on the selection of Personal Flotation Devices (PFD's) for use on board Fishing Vessels).



**Department of the Marine  
and Natural Resources**

*Roinn na Mara agus Acmhainní Nádurtha*

**Marine Notice  
No 7 of 2002**

To all Fishing Vessel Owners, Agents, Skippers, Fishing Vessel Crew  
Members, Fishermen, and Chandlers.

**GUIDANCE ON THE SELECTION OF PERSONAL FLOTATION  
DEVICES (PFDs) FOR USE ON-BOARD FISHING VESSELS**

WITHDRAWAL OF MARINE NOTICE NO. 14 OF 2000

Marine Notice No. 14 of 2000: Use of Lifejackets (LJ) & Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) is hereby withdrawn.

GENERAL

The Department of the Marine and Natural Resources wishes to remind skippers and those working onboard fishing vessels about the new Regulations on Personal Flotation Devices, PFDs, which came into operation on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2002.

These regulations are the Fishing Vessel (Personal Flotation Devices) Regulations, 2001 (S.I. No. 586 of 2001). These regulations apply to all crewmembers on board fishing vessels, other than those registered under the laws of another state. The regulations require that every fishing vessel carry a suitable personal flotation device for every person onboard. The personal flotation device shall be worn at all times by the crew when on an exposed deck, or for undecked vessels when on board the vessel, whether at sea, in harbour or coming to and from moorings. The skipper shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that all crewmembers wear a personal flotation device. The criteria, which the regulations refer to for determining suitability, include:

1. The device is sufficient to give a person using it a positive buoyancy in waters which are likely to be encountered where the vessel on which it is required to be used is reasonably likely to be.
2. The device is appropriate to the body weight of the person who is to wear it and also to the type of work being done.
3. The device has on it the CE conformity marking consisting of the initials "CE" taking the form of the specimen given (shown below) in Annex IV of Council Directive 89/686/EEC of 21 December 1989 (as amended by Council Directive 93/68/EEC of 22 July 1993 and Council Directive 96/58/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 3 September 1996).

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## TYPES OF PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICES

The term personal flotation device is an all-encompassing term, which covers all forms of personal protective equipment, intended to help keep a person afloat. These range from 'CE' marked lifejackets through to 'CE' marked buoyancy aids. The following table lists the different types of PFDs acceptable under this legislation and a brief description is given together with suggestions for areas of use.

| Type and Markings  | Suggested Uses  |
|--|---|
| <br>EN 399 - 275N  | For offshore use in extreme conditions when heavy protective clothing is being worn or when extra loads are being carried. Turns unconscious wearers face up in water under almost all circumstances. May be suitable for use in situations where there may be a delay in rescue.   |
| <br>EN 396 - 150N | For swimmers and non-swimmers of any age. For offshore use. Turns most unconscious wearers face up in water (depending on the clothing worn). These may be suitable for use in tidal waters or when foul weather clothing is being worn and where the wearers may not be capable of helping themselves due to injury or exhaustion. |
| <br>EN 395 - 100N | For swimmers of any age. For use in relatively sheltered waters, will not turn unconscious wearers face up in water (depending on the clothing worn). May be suitable in instances where the wearers remain capable of helping themselves.  |
| <br>EN 393 - 50N  | Only for good swimmers and for use in sheltered waters where help is close at hand. Will not hold the face of an unconscious wearer clear of the water. For adults only (+40kg). May be suitable in circumstances where more bulky or buoyant devices could impair the user's activity or actually endanger them. Not a lifejacket. |

Note: EuroNorm (EN) refers to European wide standards, which are used for ensuring the uniformity and minimum standards for products and services.

The above table is for guidance only and skippers are to assess the risks appropriate to their area of operation and select personal flotation devices appropriately.

#### NOTES FOR SELECTION OF PFDs

The selection of PFDs is a complex issue and it is dependent on many factors such as area of operation for the vessel, seasonal variations, night and day time work, type of work being carried out, ease of use etc.... In this section we have attempted to deal with these issues and to highlight concerns and issues which should be considered in selecting a PFD.

Inherently buoyant flotation suits are popular especially in cold weather. A particular benefit of these suits is their thermal protection offered against cold-water shock and hypothermia. However, in warm weather they become very hot to work in. Fishermen should also be aware that because the suit floats in a horizontal position an unconscious person might float either face-up or face-down.

Inflatable PFDs such as those complying with EN 396 and EN 399 are lightweight and less restrictive and can be worn comfortably in both warm and cold weather. They can also be fitted with automatic inflation devices and may turn the wearer face upwards in the water, depending on clothing worn. These types of PFDs are also available in versions where they are incorporated into clothing such as oilskins and work suits.

If the wearer is unconscious when entering the water, only automatically activated devices will inflate and fishermen who have the manually activated type must be aware of this limitation.

Consideration should also be given to fitting personal flotation devices with lights. These lights should comply with the EuroNorm standard EN394.

#### GUIDANCE FOR CORRECT USE OF PFDs

1. Inflatable personal flotation devices must be worn over all clothing and not underneath. This is to ensure that there is sufficient space for the device to inflate and that the wearer's breathing is not restricted.
2. PFDs should be worn correctly to prevent them from riding up above the wearer's shoulders.
3. Wearers should be fully familiar with the operation of their inflatable PFDs both manually and automatically.
4. Inflatable PFDs should be checked regularly and maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. As a minimum, checks should include ensuring that the gas cartridges have not been



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