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**REPORT OF INVESTIGATION  
INTO FATAL INCIDENT  
ON LOUGH CORRIB  
NEAR ANNAGHDOWN,  
CO GALWAY  
ON  
19th MARCH 2012**

**REPORT No. MCIB/213  
(No.14 of 2012)**

Report MCIB/213 published by The Marine Casualty Investigation Board  
Printed 10th December 2012.

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## 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 On 19th March 2012 two men, who were both wearing life jackets, went angling in an 18ft open boat on Lough Corrib. During the afternoon the boat was struck by a large wave/s and both men were thrown into the water and were separated from the boat. One man swam to an island and eventually raised the alarm. The other man became separated from his lifejacket. Both men were airlifted to Galway University Hospital by helicopter, one man was pronounced dead at the hospital and the other was reported suffering from hypothermia.

## 2. FACTUAL INFORMATION

### 2.1 The Vessel

Type:	“Anglers Fancy” Open lake boat with buoyancy tanks.
LOA:	5.70m
Beam:	1.50m
Depth:	0.64m
Freeboard:	0.38m
Construction:	Moulded GRP with simulated clinker finish.
Year:	2004
Builders:	GRP Hull by O’Sullivan Marine of Tralee. Wood thwarts and gunwales by Meaghers of Borisakane.
Engine:	10hp Honda outboard.
Owner:	Mr Michael Ruane - aged 53 years.
Crew:	Mr Donal Coyle - aged 48 years.
CE Plate:	The vessel had no CE Plate.
Safety Equipment:	The vessel was not equipped with any safety equipment.
Lifejackets:	Mr Ruane wore a Wave Line (S. No 726091) automatically inflating PFD, fitted with a crotch strap. New in Jan 2012 and next service date 2015. Mr Coyle wore a Parmaris - Mod No QF150 Raider automatically inflating PFD, not fitted with a crotch strap. New in July 2004 (other details unreadable).

### 2.2 Voyage Particulars

Private angling day trip from and to Ballindiff Pier, Lough Corrib, Co Galway.  
Vessel departed on morning of 19th March at 11:00hrs - See chart in Appendix 1.

### 2.3 Marine Incident Information

Type:	Fatal Accident
Date:	19th March 2012
Time:	15:20 to 17:39hrs UTC

Approximate Position:	Lat 53° 24'N - Long 009° 06'W
Weather:	Wind WSW 15 to 20kts gusting 30kts (Force 4-5 gusting 6) Clear with occasional showers Visibility, good Air temperature 10°C to 11°C Sea state moderate
Vessel Operation:	Private Angling (not a ghillie operation).
Human factors:	Not following safe practices/procedures.
Consequences:	Fatality and Hypothermia.

## 2.4 Shore Authority Involvement and Emergency Response

The following is a summary of the Situation Report from MRSC Valentia:

- 16:40hrs Emergency 999 call from mobile phone reports angler in water.  
Helicopter R115 and Corrib-Mask voluntary rescue RIB tasked and mayday relay messages broadcast.
- 16:55hrs R115 Lift off.
- 17:33hrs R115 on scene and casualty onboard returning to Galway hospital.
- 17:39hrs R115 turned back to uplift 2nd casualty with possible hypothermia.
- 17:46hrs Both casualties en route to Galway hospital.
- 17:50hrs Corrib-Mask rescue stood down.
- 18:13hrs R115 lands Galway hospital.

### 3. NARRATIVE

- 3.1 At about 11:00hrs on 19th March two fishermen left Ballindiff Pier on the east shore of Lough Corrib to go angling for the day. The owner of the boat Mr Michael Ruane had recently purchased it from his companion Mr Donal Coyle, and it was the first time for the new owner to helm the boat. At least one other boat left this pier about the same time. The weather at the time was windy with squalls. Both men had fished on the lake for about 20 years and were not overly concerned with the conditions.
- 3.2 They had lunch on Lime Island and then drifted ENE. Shortly after 15:00hrs they decided to head back to Ballindiff Bay which involved motoring west to the main channel. Mr Ruane was at the helm sitting on the aft starboard thwart and Mr Coyle was sitting on the swivel seat in the forward thwart.
- 3.3 At about 15:30hrs they were in the vicinity of channel markers 54-55 when the vessel went over a large wave and heeled over with the starboard gunwale nearly in the water. Both men were thrown into the water. The boat was still under full power and circled around the men about twice and then went away from them.
- 3.4 Both lifejackets inflated, the men shouted for help but no one heard them. The men drifted apart. Mr Coyle reported difficulty in keeping his lifejacket on as it had no crotch strap, he drifted for about 25 minutes and arrived at an island and went ashore. Looking back he thought he saw Mr Ruane but it was only his lifejacket that came ashore.
- 3.5 Mr Coyle tried his mobile phone but it was wet and would not work. He blew the whistle on his lifejacket as he walked from one side of the small island to the other searching for help.
- 3.6 Shortly afterwards he spotted their boat drifting to the shore of the island. He hung Mr Ruane's lifejacket on a bush to attract attention and then got in the boat to search for him. He saw another boat and attracted their attention and they came over to him.
- 3.7 The crew of the other boat phoned the Coast Guard on their mobile phone at 16:40hrs. Both boats commenced a search for Mr Ruane and other boats, including the Corrib-Mask rescue RIB which had been tasked by Valentia MRSC, joined the search.
- 3.8 At 17:33hrs Mr Ruane was located by another boat and hoisted on board the helicopter.

- 3.9 By this time Mr Coyle had been in wet clothes for about two hours and was very cold, and the helicopter was recalled to lift him also, this being completed at 17:39hrs.
- 3.10 Both men were admitted to Galway University Hospital where Mr Ruane was in asystolic arrest on admission and was pronounced dead at 19:00hrs. The post mortem concluded that death was due to acute cardio-pulmonary failure subsequent to drowning.
- 3.11 Mr Coyle was reported suffering from hypothermia and was released later that day.
- 3.12 Summary of time line of incident:
- |                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| 15:00hrs          | Vessel commenced return to Ballindiff bay.                                      |
| 15:30hrs (approx) | Vessel at markers 54-55 when hit by large wave, both men thrown into the water. |
| 15:50hrs (approx) | Mr Coyle ashore on Island.  |
| 16:20hrs (approx) | Mr Coyle recovers the boat.   |
| 16:40hrs          | Phone call to Coast Guard.  |
| 16:55hrs          | Helicopter R115 lift off.   |
| 17:33hrs          | Mr Ruane on board helicopter.   |
| 17:39hrs          | Mr Coyle on board helicopter.   |
| 17:50hrs          | Corrib-Mask rescue stood down.  |
| 18:13hrs          | R115 lands at Galway, casualties handed over to hospital staff.                 |
| 19:00hrs          | Mr Ruane pronounced dead.   |

## 4. ANALYSIS

- 4.1 Inspection of the boat and other similar boats used on the lake reveal a number of points:
  - 4.1.1 The boats have buoyancy tanks and double floors so that they will float even when swamped.
  - 4.1.2 In addition to wooden transverse thwarts most of the boats have revolving seats mounted on the thwarts - these seats can be removed. The boat in use had two such seats one on the forward thwart and on the second from aft thwart. These seats were both slightly offset to starboard and did not have a locking mechanism and are always free to revolve.
  - 4.1.3 The boats have a low freeboard, 380mm (15 inches) when unladen.
  - 4.1.4 Some resistance to rolling was provided by the skeg keel and the clinker simulation sides.
- 4.2 The boat was built in 2004 and should have had a CE plate to show it complied with the Recreational Craft Directive (RCD). Investigations show that the GRP hull was built by one builder and the boat fitted out and sold by another firm and that neither builder had received compliance for the vessel. Subsequent to the incident, it is understood that Meaghers are seeking to have their boats CE proofed and this class of boat will be classed as Category C - max 3 persons - and Max 10hp engine. The addition of the swivel seat was also assessed and found not to have a detrimental effect on the static stability in calm water.
- 4.3 Weight distribution and boat handling will have an effect on a boats performance whatever the category. The swivel seat that Mr Coyle was sitting in was on the forward thwart and mounted slightly to starboard - see Appendix 7.2 (Photos 1 & 2). Whilst it may not have had a detrimental effect on stability whilst fishing when the boat was under way other factors would come into play.
  - 4.3.1 The position in the bow, the narrowest part of the boat would not be the best place to sit when the boat heels.
  - 4.3.2 The seat was offset to starboard which was the direction the boat heeled.
  - 4.3.3 The momentum of the person sitting in the seat would rotate them sideways in the direction of heel, in this case to starboard.
  - 4.3.4 The net result was that the person in the swivel seat was situated above and close to the starboard gunwale on an unstable platform so when the boat heeled he was easily thrown into the water.

- 4.4 Met Éireann had a small craft warning in force and winds up to 20 knots with gusts of 30 knots forecast. When the anglers set out, conditions did not appear to be of much concern, however they did deteriorate later on and the air was cold. Large waves are not uncommon on Lough Corrib particularly when there are winds over current conditions and good boat handling skills are required to negotiate them. In this regard this was the first time Mr Ruane had helmed the boat as prior to this the boat had belonged to Mr Coyle, who usually helmed it.
- 4.5 The tiller of the engine was on the port side and he was sitting on the starboard side of the aft thwart. They had been heading into the wind and waves, but on turning into the channel the wind and waves would have been coming from the port side causing the boat to roll. Mr Coyle reported the boat encountering a large wave and the starboard gunwale was nearly in the water just before he fell in.
- 4.6 Inspection of the life jackets found them both in good condition, and they both inflated correctly during the incident. Mr Coyle's had no crotch strap and the crotch strap on Mr Ruane's was not secured when it was recovered. As Mr Ruane's lifejacket came off after immersion, therefore it is not unreasonable to assume that it was not fastened between his legs when he was thrown into the water.
- 4.7 The waist straps on both jackets, when inspected subsequently, appeared not to have been adjusted and were expanded to full extent. On Mr Coyle's this was a circumference of 132cm (52 inches) and on Mr Ruane's 137cm (54 inches). Mr Coyle's chest measurement was about 118cm (44 inches) and Mr Ruane's was similar. This would leave about a 25cm (10 inches) slackness of the waist strap in relation to the chest. Appendix 7.2 (see Photo 3). The buoyancy of the jacket would pull the waist strap up over the chest, even with the extra clothing the men were wearing. The wearing of a lifejacket or PFD is mandatory for occupants of vessels of less than 7 meters LOA, the legislation does not cover the correct or incorrect wearing of such a lifejacket or PFD.
- 4.8 Mr Ruane was wearing waist high waders, once these filled with water it would be almost impossible for him to stay afloat without a lifejacket. Mr Coyle was wearing wellington boots and he found he had difficulty in manoeuvring when they filled up with water. He emptied them when he got ashore. Mr Coyle was wearing thermal underclothes and reported that his hands and feet became very cold and this affected his dexterity.
- 4.9 The boat was powered by a 10hp outboard motor which was in almost new condition. The throttles on outboard engines are not spring loaded so they remain at the setting even when released. It was fitted with a Kill Cord which would stop the engine when pulled off. This cord was not connected to Mr Ruane so when he fell overboard the engine remained running at full power and the boat became separated from the men in the water. It also nearly ran them down before it motored away. The engine eventually stopped when the propeller

fouled the ground in shallow water. There was some damage observed to the propeller and skeg of the outboard motor. Evidence from the Lough Corrib-Mask rescue service and interviews with other anglers indicate that this is quite a frequent occurrence, without the tragic consequences.

- 4.10 The use of Kill Cords is included in the syllabus for the National Powerboat Scheme. Marine Safety Working Group's guide "Angling Safety Guide" clearly gives information on the correct wearing of lifejackets and the use of Kill Cords on outboard motors (extract in Appendix 7.5).
- 4.11 The consequences of being separated from the boat was that the two men were left in cold water some distance from land and with very little prospect of being seen by another boat. Their only means of communication appears to have been mobile phones which have good coverage on inland waterways. Mr Coyle's phone was on his person, but was wet and thus unusable. A certain amount of protection for a phone can be provided by a zip lock plastic bag, or by a waterproof pouch. Had the phone been so protected the alarm could have been raised up to an hour earlier.
- 4.12 The *Code of practice for the Safe Use of Recreational Craft* recommends that boats used on inland waters should carry 2 orange smoke canisters and a foghorn. The boat did not have any means of indicating distress or attracting attention. Had it had either of the above Mr Coyle may have attracted the attention of other boats more quickly. In addition, if the craft which recovered Mr Ruane had smoke floats they could have identified themselves to the helicopter.
- 4.13 The use of hand held VHF radios is not common practice among anglers and small boats on the lake. Some larger motor boats may have a VHF radio. The Corrib-Mask rescue service stated that there is not full VHF coverage on the lakes, with contact to a coast radio station limited to certain parts.
- 4.14 The time from initially falling in the water to the phone call to the Coast Guard was about 1½ hours. By the time Mr Ruane was lifted he had been in the water for approximately 2¼ hours. He probably lost his lifejacket shortly after being thrown into the water. He was wearing waders and would have expended a lot of energy trying to stay afloat.
- 4.15 There was no record of the water temperature, but the air temperature was 10°C so the water temperature was probably lower. The table in Appendix 7.3 shows that in water, at a temperature of less than 10°C, exhaustion and unconsciousness sets in between 30 and 60 minutes. Mr Coyle, who was 6 years younger, suffered from severe hypothermia mainly due to wind chill. A spare dry windproof jacket in the boat would have helped prevent this.
- 4.16 Met Éireann had a small craft warning in force and winds up to 20 knots with gusts of 30 knots forecast. When the anglers set out conditions did not appear to

be of much concern, however conditions did deteriorate later on and the air was cold. Large waves are not uncommon on Lough Corrib and good boat handling skills are required to negotiate them. In this regard this was the first time Mr Ruane had helmed the boat as prior to this the boat had belonged to Mr Coyle, who usually helmed it.

- 4.17 Unlike other recreational craft users such as sailors, canoeists and scuba divers, anglers do not expect to enter the water and there is no training programme in place to alert them to the dangers and prepare them to cope with such a situation.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The two men fell overboard when the boat encountered a large wave or waves and suddenly heeled over to starboard.
- 5.2 The revolving seat used by one of the men meant both his height above the gunwale and his position right forward may have had an influence on the handling and stability of the boat. Had this man been sitting lower down and amidships his chances of being thrown overboard when the boat heeled would have been significantly decreased.
- 5.3 Personal Floatation Devices (PFDs) were worn by both men, they were in good condition and both inflated correctly.
- 5.4 The PFD on one man came off after immersion despite a crotch strap being fitted. The other man experienced difficulty in keeping his on, it had no crotch strap. Both jackets were found to have incorrectly adjusted waist straps.
- 5.5 The Kill Cord on the engine was not used and once in the water the men were separated from their boat. The consequence of this was a long period of immersion in cold water which led to the death of one of the men and hypothermia of the other.
- 5.6 There was a delay of over an hour in raising the alarm due to separation from the boat, lack of recognised means of indicating distress and the failure of a mobile phone after it was immersed in the water.
- 5.7 It appears that the vessel was not compliant with EU Recreational Craft Directive 2003/44/EC.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 That owners and operators of recreational craft should be aware and follow the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport's Code of Practice for the Safe Operation of Recreational Craft.
- 6.2 That the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport should monitor and enforce the Recreational Craft Directive.
- 6.3 That the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport should arrange for the erection of safety notices containing a precis of the Recreational Craft Directive at all recognised launching sites.

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# APPENDIX 7.1

Appendix 7.1 Chart of Luimneach and Annaghdown area of Lough Corrib.

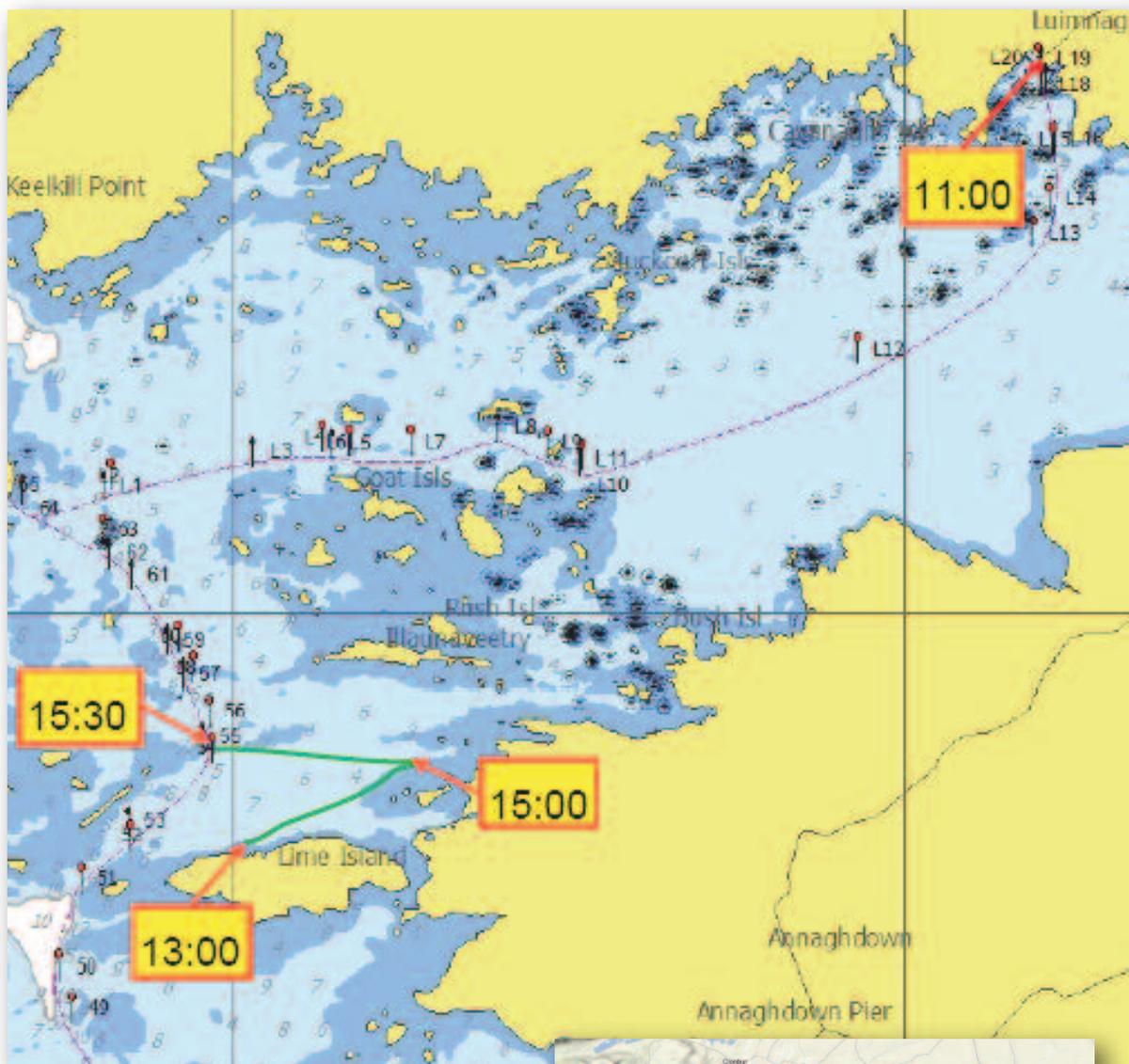
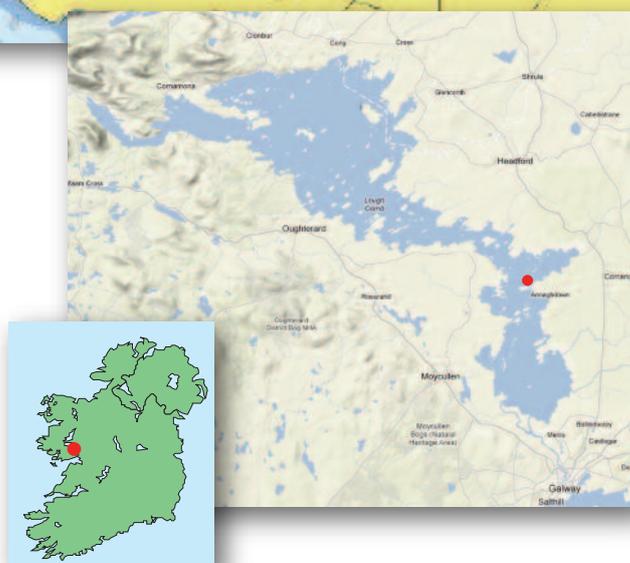


Chart by courtesy of anglingcharts.com



Appendix 7.2 Photographs.



Photo 1: The boat - note two mounts for revolving seats.



Photo 2: Revolving seat.

Appendix 7.2 Photographs.



Photo 3: Mr Ruane's Lifejacket - note lack of adjustment of waist strap.

Appendix 7.3 Expected survival time in cold water.

Water Temperature	Exhaustion or Unconsciousness in	Expected Survival Time
70–80° F (21–27° C)	3–12 hours	3 hours – indefinitely
60–70° F (16–21° C)	2–7 hours	2–40 hours
50–60° F (10–16° C)	1–2 hours	1–6 hours
<b>40–50° F (4–10° C)</b>	<b>30–60 minutes</b>	<b>1–3 hours</b>
32.5–40° F (0–4° C)	15–30 minutes	30–90 minutes
<32° F (<0° C)	Under 15 minutes	Under 15–45 minutes

Source: UNITED STATES SEARCH AND RESCUE TASK FORCE

## Appendix 7.4 Met Éireann Weather Report.



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

Glasnevin Hill, Cnoc Ghlas Naíon Tel: +353-1-806 4200  
Dublin 9, Ireland. Baile Átha Cliath 9, Éire. Fax: +353-1-806 4247  
www.met.ie E-mail: met.eroann@met.ie

24/4/2012

*Our Ref.* WS3018/2\_14572  
*Your Ref.* MCIB/12/213

**Estimate of weather conditions on Lough Corrib near Annaghdown,  
Galway, on the 19<sup>th</sup> March 2012, between 12 hours and 24 hours.**

**Conditions 12 to 18 hours:**

**Winds:** from a south-south-west direction, 15 to 20 knots gusting 30 knots (Force 4 to 5 with stronger gusts)

**Weather:** mostly cloudy and dry, however there were occasional breaks in the cloud and occasional patches of light drizzle.

**Visibility:** mostly good, greater than 10km

**Temperature:** air temperatures were 10° to 11°C

**18 hours to 24 hours**

**Winds:** from a south to south-west direction, 11 to 15 knots, gusting 30 knots at first but the gusts eased during the evening ( Force 4 with stronger gusts at first)

**Weather:** mostly cloudy with occasional patches of drizzle

**Visibility:** moderate to good

**Temperatures:** air temperatures were 10° to 11°C

Evelyn Murphy B.Sc. M.Sc. Meteorologist  
Research & Applications Division  
Met Éireann



Appendix 7.5 Extract from MSWG Anglers Safety Guidelines.

## Regular servicing of all safety equipment is highly recommended

### Personal floatation devices for boat anglers

For general information and advice on choosing lifejackets and buoyancy aids see page xx.

- By law in Ireland all boats must carry sufficient suitable personal floatation devices (PFDs) for everyone on board. This means having PFDs that will fit all on board, including children.
- It is the skipper's responsibility to show everyone where the PFDs are stowed, how to put them on and secure them, and when and how to operate them.
- By law in Ireland anyone on deck or on board an open boat that is under 7m long must wear a suitable PFD.
- Suitable PFDs should be worn when a boat is out in poor weather conditions, restricted visibility, or at night.
- By law in Ireland anyone under the age of 16 years must wear a suitable PFD on deck or in an open boat irrespective of the boat's size.
- People drown every year because they do not wear suitable PFDs.
- It is important to make sure that your PFD is a proper fit and is being worn correctly. Use the crotch straps.

### Kill cords

All powerboats must be fitted with a kill cord that stops the engine every time the driver leaves the controls – whether they do so voluntarily or involuntarily in an emergency.



- Never operate the boat without the kill switch in place
- The kill cord must be properly secured to your body (see page xx) [later]
- Regularly check that the kill cord is functioning by using it to turn off the engine.
- Don't forget your kill cord. Either lead it round a strong point on your buoyancy aid or lifejacket, or round your leg. Then secure it back onto itself, making sure the clip is fully closed. Do not secure the kill cord to your wrist - the temptation to unhook may be too great.

## 8. CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

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**Note:** The address and contact details of the individual respondent have been obscured for privacy reasons.

Marine Casualty Investigation Board,  
Leeson Lane,  
Dublin 2.

18<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

Your reference; MCIB/12/213

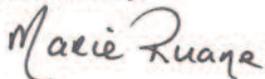
Dear Mr O Donnell,

On reading your report there are two points which are incorrect the date of the accident was 19<sup>th</sup> March 2012 not 19<sup>th</sup> April 2012 as stated and Mike's date of birth is 13/11/1958 he was 53 years old.

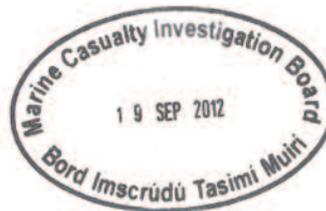
I would like to take this opportunity to thank Donal Coyle for his extreme bravery that evening together with the other anglers and the Corrib-Mask rescue rib who helped in the search.

Also I wish to extend my sincere thanks to Coast Guard, the medical staff at Galway University Hospital and the Garda.

Yours sincerely,



Marie Ruane.

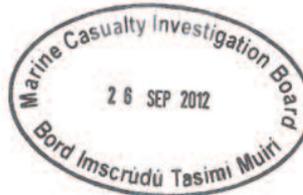


#### MCIB RESPONSE

The MCIB notes the contents of this correspondence and have made the necessary amendments.



Ms. Helen Conway,  
Secretariat,  
Marine Casualty Investigation Board,  
Leeson Lane,  
Dublin 2



25<sup>th</sup> September 2012

Dear Ms Conway,

Thank you for forwarding a copy of the draft report on the incident in Lough Corrib on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

I appreciate the opportunity to review the content on behalf of the Irish Red Cross and wish to confirm that the Irish Red Cross has no objection to the content of the report.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Fintan Breen  
Head of National Services

Humanity  
Impartiality  
Neutrality  
Independence  
Voluntary Service  
Unity  
Universality

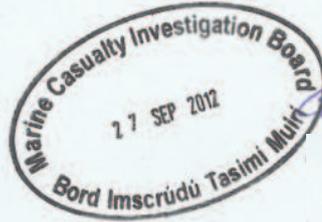
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✉ info@redcross.ie  
www.redcross.ie

## MCIB RESPONSE

The MCIB notes the contents of this correspondence.

Ms Helen Conway,  
Secretariat,  
M.C.I.B.



24/9/12  
REF: MCIB/12/213

Dear Helen,

Thank you for sending me copy of draft report of incident on Lough Corrib 19/3/12.

Just a couple of points I would like to clarify:

- ① Date of incident 19/3/12
- ② In my opinion my cousin Mr. Mike Ruane, would have been kept afloat by his lifejacket for at least the 1<sup>st</sup> 15-20 minutes after immersion and he would have only come detached from it in the last 10-15 minutes before I made it to shore myself.

May I also thank all involved in drafting this report and the sensitive manner in which it was carried out  
If possible may I also

extend my gratitude through your report to all those who attended on the day, the anglers, the crew of the Irish coast guard helicopter, the Corrib rescue craft, the Gardaí, the staff of the A and E at U.C.H.G., much thanks to all.

Hope all is in order,  
Yours Sincerely,  
Donal Doyle.



Mr. Coyle suggested the following amendments to the report:

1. Pg 5, point 2.3 Date change from 19<sup>th</sup> April 2012 to 19<sup>th</sup> March 2012
2. Pg 9, point 4.6 Remove "Shortly after immersion"
3. Pg 13, Point 5.4 Remove "shortly after immersion"

**MCIB RESPONSE**

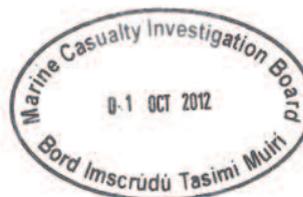
The MCIB notes the contents of this correspondence and have made the necessary amendments.



# Ballindiff Bay Angling Club

LUIMNAGH, CORRANDULLA, CO. GALWAY.

Telephone: 093-31855



Ms Helen Conway  
Secretariat  
Marine Casualty Investigation Board  
Lesson Lane  
Dublin 2

Dear Mr. O'Donnell

Thank you for the copy of the Draft Report of the Investigation into the Fatal Incident on Lough Corrib on 19th March 2012. I note the conclusions and recommendations of the report. On publication of the report the club will inform all members of the recommendations and safe practice while Leisure Angling.

I have no comments to make other than to add that the Club will inform all members of the need to follow safe practices and procedures.

Yours sincerely,

Sean Grehan  
Secretary  
Ballindiff Bay Angling Club

27 September 2012

## MCIB RESPONSE

The MCIB notes the contents of this correspondence.