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REPORT OF INVESTIGATION
INTO A FATAL INCIDENT
INVOLVING THE CAPSIZED
DRASCOMBE LUGGER,
"ZILLAH"
OFF SCHULL, CO. CORK
ON
13th AUGUST 2014

REPORT NO. MCIB/240 (No.5 OF 2015)



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		PAGE
1.	SUMMARY	4
2.	FACTUAL INFORMATION	5
3.	NARRATIVE	7
4.	ANALYSIS	11
5.	CONCLUSIONS	12
6.	SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS	13
7.	APPENDICES	14
8.	CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED	20





SUMMARY

1.1 On Wednesday 13th August 2014, the deceased took two friends for a sail in his Drascombe Lugger "Zillah" in the vicinity of Schull Harbour, Schull, Co. Cork. After about an hour sailing in Castle Island Channel, the vessel was returning to Schull. As the vessel approached the Amelia Buoy off the western end of Castle Island, the vessel gybed unintentionally and capsized throwing all three occupants into the water. The two guests were able to climb onto the upturned hull of the vessel, but the Skipper/Owner failed to do so and remained in the water. The three occupants attempted to swim to Castle Island when it became clear that the vessel was drifting out to sea. The guests made it to the shore and climbed the rocks, but the Skipper/Owner did not reach the shore. The alarm was raised by the Skipper/Owner's wife when the party had not returned at the appointed hour.

The search was initiated by the Schull Community Inshore Rescue Services (SCIRS) and co-ordinated by Valentia Coast Guard MRSC who advised Baltimore Inshore Life Boat (ILB) and Life Boat (LB), Goleen Coast Guard Unit (CGU) and Irish Coast Guard Helicopter R115. The search was suspended at midnight and recommenced at first light on Thursday 14th August 2014, at which time MRSC Valentia appointed the "LE Niamh" to co-ordinate the search. The two guests were airlifted from Castle Island to Baltimore. Later that morning the deceased was located and removed to Baltimore. The capsized vessel was returned to Schull.



2. FACTUAL INFORMATION

2.1 Vessel Description

Type of Vessel: Drascombe Lugger, undecked open day boat.

Name: "Zillah".

Construction: GRP solid laminate hull with moulded lapstrake

construction. Moulded deck with hardwood trim.

Galvanised mild steel pivoting centreboard and rudder.

Buoyancy chambers under side benches and aft locker filled

with polystyrene blocks or beads.

Outboard motor well for'd of transom.

Hull Number: 1861.

Builder: Honnor Marine, Totnes, UK.

Year of Build: 1996.

RCD Code: None. Built before RCD (Recreational Craft Directive)

became a requirement.

Hull Colour: White with blue stripe above rubbing strake. Blue antifoul

paint below waterline.

LOA: 18'9" (5.72 m).

LWL: 14'6" (4.42 m).

Beam: 6'3" (1.91 m).

Draft: 4' (1.22 m) centreplate down / 10" (0.25 m) centreplate

up.

Engine: 5hp Johnson outboard motor mounted in well.

Safety Equipment: Personal Flotation Devices (Buoyancy aids) worn by each of

the three on board. No safety equipment on-board.

The first (wooden) Drascombe Lugger was introduced in 1968 and since then, approximately 2000 of these boats have been built. Since 1969, they have been manufactured from GRP. Drascombe Luggers have completed extensive ocean voyages and have proven very popular amongst day

sailors for many years. There have, however, been some questions raised in relation to the inherent stability of the pre-RCD Category C vessels and a service is offered by the manufacturers to upgrade the buoyancy of pre-RCD boats.

2.2 Conditions at time of Incident

Time of Tide Locally: HW approximately 20.05 hrs.

Weather: Wind: North-West to West-North-West, Force 4 to 5.

Isolated showers but mostly dry, bright and sunny.

Visibility: Mostly good.

Seastate: Moderate from a West-North-West direction.

Wave height: 1.5 m to 2.0 m significant wave height.

Air Temperature: 16°C.

Sea Temperature: 17°C. It should be noted that wind and waves around the

islands would vary from light and slight to above values due to shelter or exposure to wind and wave direction. (See Appendix

7.1 Met Éireann Weather Report).

2.3 Persons Involved

Skipper/Owner: 66 years of age. 30+ years sailing experience including in

Drascombe Luggers. Had owned "Zillah" for approximately 2

years.

Sailing instructor in UK before moving to Ireland approximately

1 year previously.

Male Guest: 76 years of age. Limited sailing experience with the deceased

on a few occasions.

Female Guest: 60 years of age. Sailed before but little experience.

All were wearing light summer clothes - shirts, trousers, light jackets and buoyancy aids. One of the guests wore flip-flops.



3. NARRATIVE

3.1 Events prior to the Incident

- 3.1.1 At 15.30 hrs on Wednesday 13th August 2014, the deceased and his two guests left his home in Dunmanus, Goleen, Co. Cork to travel to Schull to go sailing in the Drascombe Lugger "Zillah".
- 3.1.2 At approximately 16.00 hrs, on arrival at Schull Harbour, the Skipper/Owner launched his rubber dinghy and went to fetch the "Zillah" from her mooring in the harbour. Before leaving, he issued his two guests with personal flotation devices of the buoyancy aid type.
- 3.1.3 When the Skipper/Owner returned with the "Zillah", the guests climbed onboard and they motored out of the harbour using the outboard engine.
- 3.1.4 On the way out they hoisted the sails, one of which became tangled and had to be dropped and re-hoisted. The engine was then stopped and the vessel proceeded under sail in an easterly direction into Castle Island Channel for about 40 minutes. One of the guests was on the helm at this time. (See Appendix 7.1 Chart extract of the area of the incident).
- 3.1.5 The vessel was tacked around and the intention was to head for Long Island Channel before returning to Schull Harbour. The helm was handed over to the other guest.
- 3.1.6 Although one of the guests was feeling uncomfortable and slightly sea-sick and had requested that they return to Schull, the vessel sailed between Castle Island and Long Island in a south-easterly direction towards the Amelia Buoy off the western tip of Castle Island.
- 3.1.7 At this time the wind was quite gusty but was considered to be good sailing weather.

3.2 The Incident

- 3.2.1 As they approached the Amelia Buoy, the vessel, whilst sailing on a broad reach, gybed unintentionally, broached and capsized throwing all three occupants into the water. The events happened very quickly and took all three by surprise.
- 3.2.2 Although the Skipper/Owner was not helming at the time, he was overseeing and supervising his two guests who were taking turns on the helm, however; the guests felt that the Skipper/Owner felt responsible for the incident.
- 3.2.3 The vessel very quickly turned turtle and the centreplate retracted into its stowed position in its casing.

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- 3.2.4 Both guests managed to climb onto the upturned hull and remain there. The Skipper/Owner made several attempts to climb up also, but failed to do so. He remained in the water alongside the vessel first to weather side before moving around to the leeward side in more shelter.
- 3.2.5 One of the guests tried to attract attention by standing on the upturned hull and waving, however there were no other vessels close enough to see them. In the absence of any communications equipment e.g. handheld VHF radio, they had no way of calling for assistance.
- 3.2.6 At this stage, the vessel appeared to be drifting towards Castle Island (an uninhabited island south of Schull Harbour) and it was hoped that they would be washed ashore.
- 3.2.7 After approximately 30 minutes, it became obvious that the vessel was drifting parallel to the land and would most likely drift out to sea. They were now approximately 50 metres from the island. The Skipper/Owner commented that he was beginning to feel cold.
- 3.2.8 Following discussions amongst the three, it was decided that they should all swim for the shore.
- 3.2.9 All three set out from the vessel to swim approximately 50 m to the rocky shore. As they swam, they did not notice the position of the others. Both guests arrived at the shore and climbed onto the rocks. One of the guests did not have shoes, so climbing was slow and difficult, however they both managed to climb to a dry grassy patch and realised that they were now safe. The time was now approximately 18.30 hrs.
- 3.2.10 Once on dry land, the guests looked out to sea to see if they could find the Skipper/Owner. They spotted him drifting past the island, making no effort to swim and lying passively in the water with his head clear of the water.
- 3.2.11 Knowing that Castle Island was uninhabited, the pair realised that they would have to wait to be rescued. They estimated that a rescue operation would possibly start around 20.00 hrs as they were expected back at around 19.00 hrs.
- 3.2.12 At approximately 20.30 hrs, one of the survivors saw a vessel with a blue light going down the channel.
- 3.2.13 After dark, a helicopter passed overhead but, despite the search light passing directly over the survivors, they were not spotted. At this stage they realised that they would not be seen in the dark and found shelter for the night.



3.3 Events following the Incident

- 3.3.1 At approximately 19.30 hrs on Wednesday 13th August 2014 the wife of the Skipper/Owner became concerned that he and their guests had not returned home, despite a prior arrangement to go out to dinner at 19.00 hrs.
- 3.3.2 Seeing no sign of them at Schull pier, she drove along the Colla Road to see if she could spot them out in the bay. She knew that, depending on the wind and tide, her husband would go to Long Island or toward Rossbrin and then come back.
- 3.3.3 When she did not spot the vessel in the bay, she returned to Schull pier where she met a member of the Schull Community Inshore Rescue Services (SCIRS).
- 3.3.4 The SCIRS member called the base by phone. The SCIRS RIB was already on the water taking part in a training exercise when their base contacted them by VHF with the details of the missing vessel.
- 3.3.5 The SCIRS RIB then searched from Long Island to Rossbrin but saw nothing.
- 3.3.6 At 21.09 hrs, the SCIRS base contacted MRSC Valentia by phone advising that they had received a report of an overdue vessel. Between 21.15 hrs and 21.23 hrs, MRSC Valentia tasked SCIRS, Baltimore ILB and LB, Goleen CGU and R115 helicopter to conduct a search of the area. A Customs cutter and Toe Head CGU vessel were also in the area and volunteered to join the search. Despite the number of vessels involved in the search, nothing was found and at 23.54 hrs, all SAR units were stood down by MRSC Valentia.
- 3.3.7 The Naval Service vessel "LE Niamh" advised MRSC Valentia that they would arrive on scene at 05.30 hrs the following morning. MRSC Valentia stated that they would appoint "LE Niamh" as on scene co-ordinator to continue the search at first light.
- 3.3.8 The SCIRS RIB re-fuelled at approximately 01.00 hrs and continued to search the east side of Schull Harbour until 02.00 hrs at which time, they also stood down.
- 3.3.9 At 05.15 hrs on Thursday 14th August 2014, the SCIRS RIB launched and proceeded to search the west side of Castle Island and into Carthy's sound. At 05.43 hrs, R117 took off from Waterford and at 05.45 hrs, the Baltimore ILB launched.
- 3.3.10 At approximately 05.40 hrs, whilst searching to the west of Castle Island, the crew of the SCIRS RIB heard shouting and saw figures on the cliffs of the Island, waving. The crew let the people on the Island know they had been seen with flashing lights and notified MRSC Valentia of their discovery.

At approximately 06.00 hrs, the SCIRS RIB and Baltimore ILB (who had been monitoring VHF traffic and heard the report of persons found) landed at the pier on the north side of the Island (the only pier on the Island) and the crews made their way to the location of the casualties. At 06.12 hrs, MRSC Valentia alerted R117 and the casualties were airlifted from the Island and ultimately taken to Bantry Hospital from where they were released later that day.

- 3.3.11 At 06.16 hrs, Goleen CGU launched to join the search for the Skipper/Owner and the vessel. The SCIRS RIB and Baltimore ILB also re-joined the search.
- 3.3.12 At 06.40 hrs, the Baltimore ILB located the capsized vessel on the south-east side of Carthy's Island and at 08.15 hrs, they located and recovered the body of the Skipper/Owner from the water on the north-west side of Sherkin Island from where they returned to Baltimore.
- 3.3.13 The deceased was later confirmed to have died due to 'drowning associated with hypothermia'.
- 3.3.14 At 08.17 hrs, all SAR units were stood down by MRSC Valentia.
- 3.3.15 At 08.56 hrs, the "LE Niamh" was tasked with the recovery of the capsized vessel and 11.30 hrs, Naval divers righted the vessel and it was towed in to Schull pier and handed it over to the local Gardaí. (See Photographs Appendix 7.1 and Appendix 7.2).



4. ANALYSIS

- 4.1 Although the Skipper/Owner was a competent and experienced sailor and was familiar with the vessel, the inexperienced guests were taking turns on the helm and one of them was in control when the vessel gybed unintentionally and broached leading to the capsize.
- 4.2 The vessel turned "turtle" very quickly and the centre plate fell back into its casing, possibly becoming detached from its pivot and being suspended below the upturned hull from the retrieval line. There was no mechanism for retaining the centre plate in the extended position.
- 4.3 The Skipper/Owner, having failed to climb onto the upturned hull remained in the water alongside. Although the air and sea temperature were in the midteens, he was wearing only light summer clothing and began to feel cold quite quickly.
- 4.4 There was no VHF radio, EPIRB or other form of emergency equipment on-board. Despite one of the survivors standing on the upturned hull and waving, he did not manage to attract the attention of any other vessel in the vicinity.

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CONCLUSIONS

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 When the vessel gybed unintentionally and broached, the lack of experience of the crew meant that they did not react correctly to the developing situation, leading to the capsize of the vessel.
- 5.2 The Drascombe Lugger is not fitted with a mechanism to retain the centre plate in the extended position, relying on gravity to keep it down.
- 5.3 As this vessel was built before compliance with the Recreational Craft Directive (RCD) became mandatory, there was no requirement for stability or buoyancy testing. Various experiments have been carried out by Drascombe Lugger owners and interested parties, although the results appear inconclusive, some demonstrated immense difficulty in capsizing the vessel and others showed that they capsize easily and are very difficult to right by anyone other than fit, strong sailors.
- 5.4 The clothing the Skipper/Owner and his guests were wearing would have provided very little insulation against the cold sea water. Although at 17°C, the water was relatively warm, it would soon have had a debilitating effect on anyone in the water for any length of time, particularly in the moderate wind at the time. The wearing of wet suits or other suitable sailing clothes would have considerably increased the deceased's chances of survival.
- 5.5 Had the Skipper/Owner been in possession of a handheld VHF radio, he could have immediately alerted anyone listening on Channel 16, including the emergency services, of their predicament and the rescue operation would have begun sooner with greater knowledge as to the location of the survivors. Had there been an EPIRB in a float free bracket on-board, it would have also alerted the emergency services. The same would have been true had any of the crew been in possession of a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB). Had the buoyancy aids worn by the crew been equipped with a light and whistle, it is possible that they may have been seen or heard sooner.



6. SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 It is recommended that the manufacturers of the Drascombe Lugger investigate the feasibility of installing a system whereby the centreplate can be retained in the deployed position such that it will remain extended in the event of a capsize. It should be possible to retrofit this mechanism to existing vessels.
- 6.2 It is recommended that the Drascombe Association highlight the possibility of capsizing these vessels under certain conditions.
- 6.3 It is recommended that the Drascombe Association instigate a campaign to raise awareness amongst its members of the wisdom of upgrading their vessels inbuilt buoyancy to comply with Category C of the RCD.
- 6.4 Owners and operators of recreational craft should be aware of and follow the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport's Code of Practice for the Safe Operation of Recreational Craft.

APPENDICES

7. APPENDICES

		PAGE
7.1	Met Éireann Weather Report.	15
7.2	Chart extract of the area of the incident.	18
7.3	Photographs	19



Appendix 7.1 Met Éireann Weather Report.



MET ÉIREANN

The Irish Meteorological Service

Glasnevin Hill, Dublin 9, Ireland. Cnoc Ghlas Naíon Baile Átha Cliath 9, Éire. www.met.ie

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Our Ref. WS 3018/2_15579 Your Ref. MCIB/12/240



18/8/2014

Estimate of weather conditions in the Long Island Bay sea area, on the 13th August 2014, between 12 hours and 24 hours.

General Situation

A deep depression in the North-Sea gave a fresh north-westerly airflow over the area.

Details

12-18 hours

Winds: from a North-West to West-North-Westerly direction, Moderate to Fresh in strength, Force 4 to 5.

Weather: isolated showers, but generally dry with some bright and sunny periods.

Visibility: mostly good

Sea state: Moderate (1.5m to 2m significant wave heights) at the entrance to the Bay from a west-north-westerly direction.

18-24 hours

Winds: from a west to west-north-westerly direction, mostly Moderate, Force 3 to 5.

Weather: rather cloudy, isolated showers, mostly light

Visibility: moderate at times in showers but mostly good

Sea State: Moderate (1.5m significant wave height) at the entrance of the Bay, a combination of a Sea from the west-north-west and a Swell from the west.

Note: Winds and waves around the islands would vary from Light and Slight to above values due to shelter or exposure from the wind and wave direction.

* M3 buoy and Sherkin Island observation reports attached.





Appendix 7.1 Met Éireann Weather Report.



MET ÉIREANN

The Irish Meteorological Service

Glasnevin Hill,

Cnoc Ghlas Naíon Dublin 9, Ireland. Baile Átha Cliath 9, Éire. Fax: +353-1-806 4247 www.met.ie

Tel: +353-1-806 4200 E-mail: met.eireann@met.ie

Buoy M3 at 51.2°N and 10.5°W hourly observations

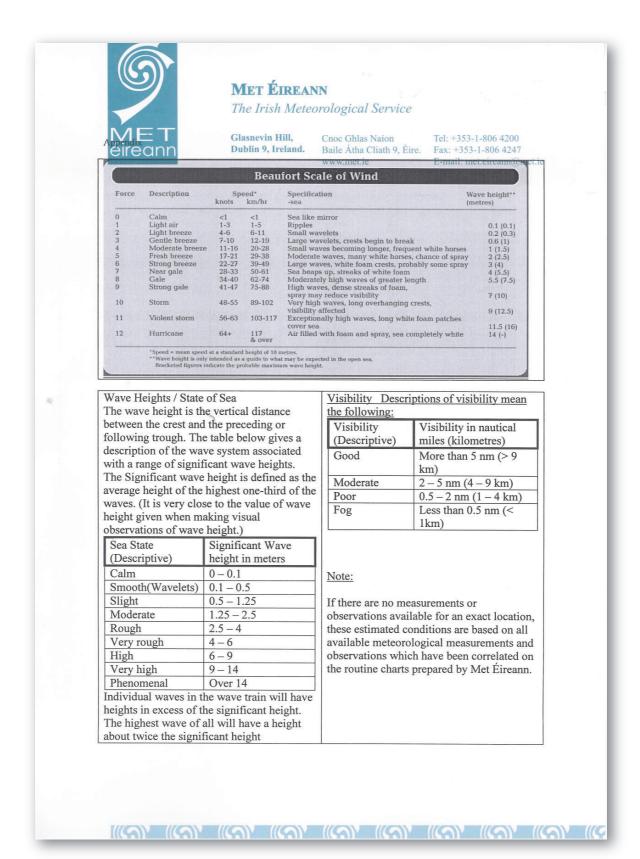
time	Sig wave height (m)	Max individual wave height (m)	Mean wave direction (°)	Air Temp (°C)	Sea Temp (°C)	Mean wind direction (°)	Max wind gust (knots)	Mean 10- minute wind speed (kts)
13/08/2014	(111)	(111)	()	()	()	()	(KIIOCS)	(RCS)
11:00	3	4.5	305.2	15.2	16.9	334.3	27.8	19.1
13/08/2014								
12:00	3	4.7	302.3	16.5	16.9	317.5	21.8	17.4
13/08/2014	1174 1111	TOTAL PART						
13:00	2.8	3.9	302.3	16.2	16.7	322	25.2	18.1
13/08/2014								
14:00	2.7	4.6	306.6	16.1	16.7	319.6	23.8	17.5
13/08/2014								
15:00	2.7	3.4	305.2	15.6	16.9	298.1	21.4	15.5
13/08/2014	2.7	3.9	202.2	16.1	17	301.6	22.2	18.2
16:00	2.7	3.9	302.3	16.1	1/	301.0	22.2	10.2
13/08/2014 17:00	2.5	4.3	305.2	16.1	17	301.3	21.2	16.8
13/08/2014	2.3		303.2	10.1		002.0		
18:00	2.3	3.2	300.9	15.9	17	299.2	22.2	17.4
13/08/2014								
19:00	2.2	3.1	300.9	14.8	17	283.7	22.6	17.9
13/08/2014								
20:00	2	2.5	295.3	15	17	310.1	22.5	16.8
13/08/2014								
21:00	2	3.1	303.8	14.4	17	324.5	21.4	16.7
13/08/2014	Salah							
22:00	2.2	3.2	296.7	15.1	16.9	311.8	20.9	13.8
13/08/2014 23:00	2.2	3.4	300.9	15.8	16.9	313.6	23.2	18.2



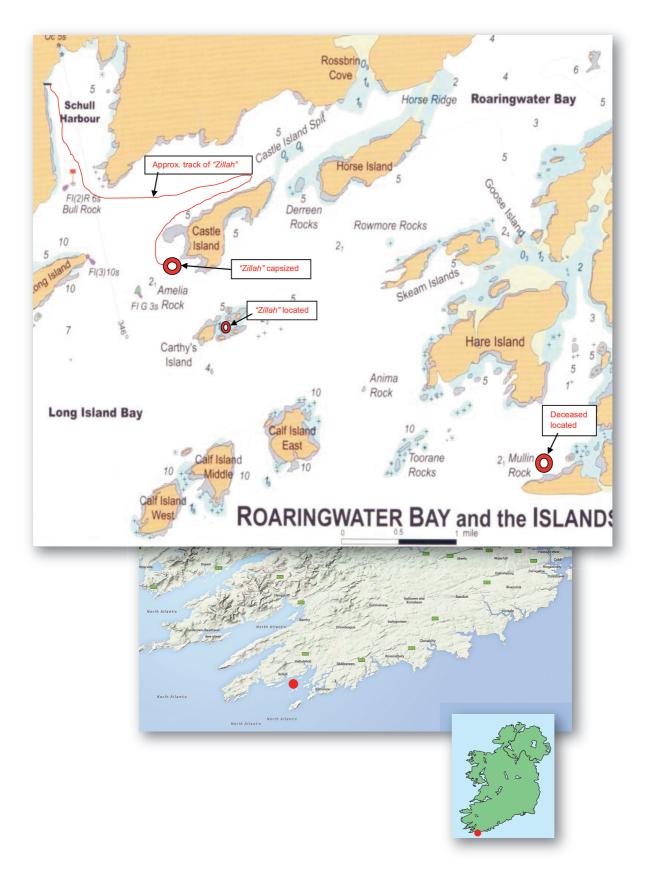




Appendix 7.1 Met Éireann Weather Report.



Appendix 7.2 Chart extract of the area of the incident.





Appendix 7.3 Photographs.



Photograph 1 - "Zillah" ashore following recovery



Photograph 2 - Damage suffered by "Zillah" following floundering

CORRESPONDENCE

8. CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

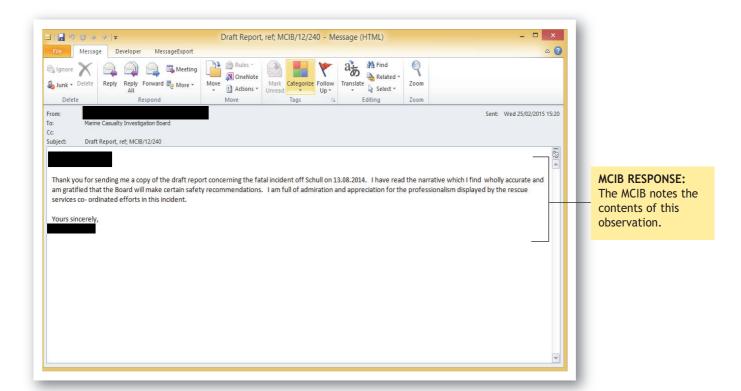
		PAGE
8.1	Correspondence from Male Guest and MCIB response	21
8.2	Correspondence from Female Guest and MCIB response	22
8.3	Correspondence from RNLI and MCIB response	23
8.4	Correspondence from Schull Community Inshore Rescue Service and MCIB response	24
8.5	Correspondence from Drascombe Association and MCIB response	25

Note: The name and contact details of the individual respondents have been obscured for privacy reasons.



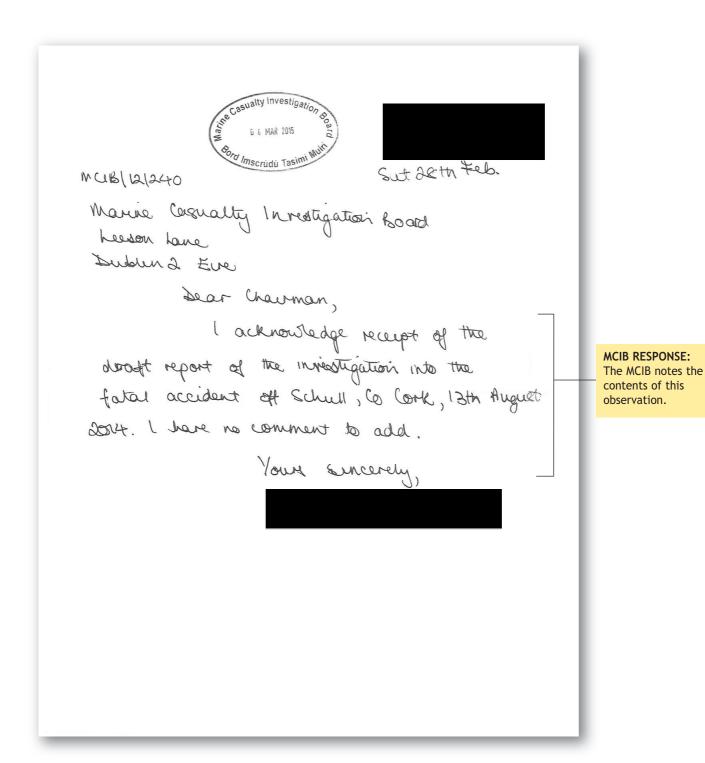
Correspondence 8.1 Male Guest and MCIB response

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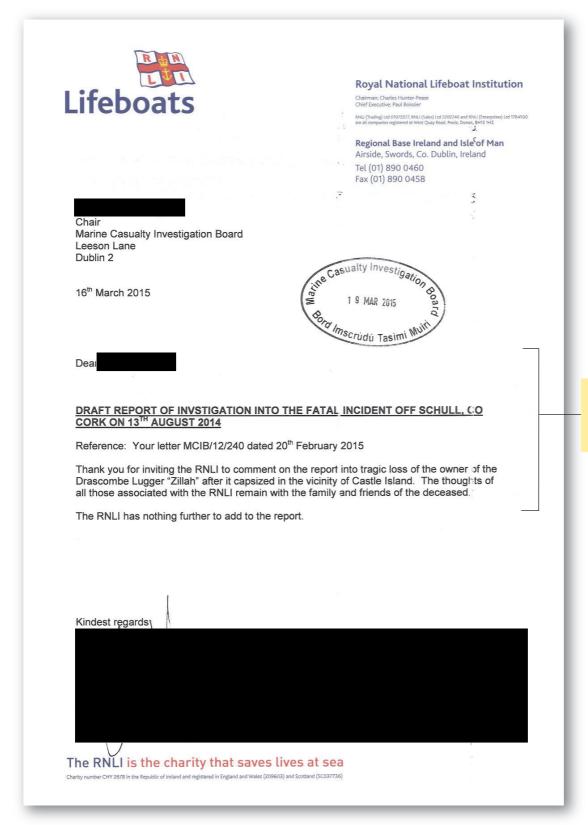
Correspondence 8.2 Female Guest and MCIB response.



22



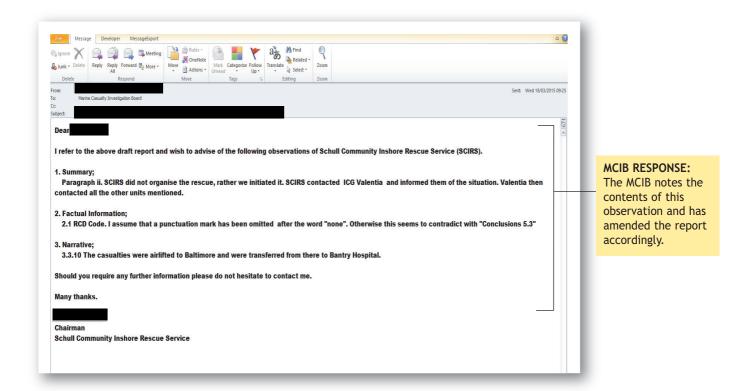
Correspondence 8.3 RNLI and MCIB Response.



MCIB RESPONSE: The MCIB notes the contents of this observation.

CORRESPONDENCE 8.4

Correspondence 8.4 Schull Community Inshore Rescue Service and MCIB response.

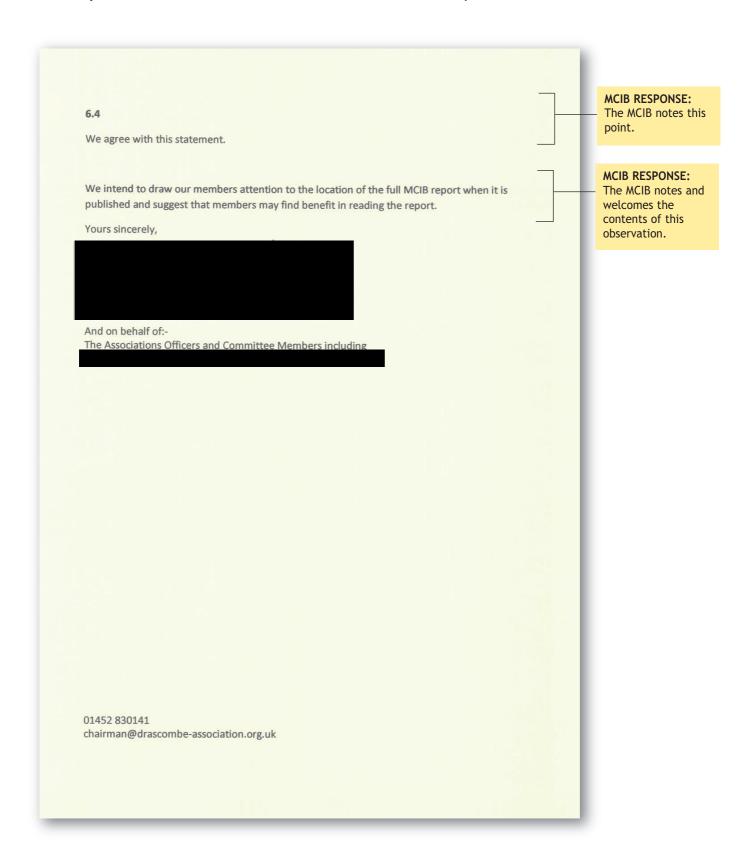




Correspondence 8.5 Drascombe Association and MCIB response.



Correspondence 8.5 Drascombe Association and MCIB response.







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