

Accident Report

Eclipse

Missing Vessel

15 miles west of Tuara Point on 5
March 2004

KEEPING YOUR SEA SAFE FOR LIFE



Maritime Safety

MARITIME SAFETY AUTHORITY OF NEW ZEALAND
Kia Maanu Kia Ora



REPORT NO: 04 3404

VESSEL NAME: ECLIPSE

CASUALTY DETAILS:

Date of Casualty: 5 March 2004

Time of Casualty: 1810 hours New Zealand Daylight Time (NZDT)

Casualty Type: Vessel Missing

Casualty Location: 15 miles West of Tuara Point

Weather Forecast Area: Kaipara

Date MSA Notified: 5 March 2004

Date Investigation Started: 5 March 2004

Date Investigation Completed: 5 August 2004

Investigator: Chris Poulter



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VESSEL NAME: ECLIPSE

VESSEL DETAILS:

Ship Name:	<i>Eclipse</i>
Date of Build:	1993
Ship Category:	Fishing Vessel
Certified Operating Limit:	Enclosed and Coastal Limits
Overall Length (m):	14.50
Registered Breadth (m):	4.30
Gross Tonnage:	25.00
Net Tonnage (t):	18.00
Flag:	New Zealand
SSM Company:	Maritime Management Services Ltd



SUMMARY

During a voyage from Hokianga to Houhora the Skipper and crew decided to do some Game Fishing. While fishing they had a ‘double strike’ of Blue Marlin which were difficult to play and bring on board. It was decided to launch the dinghy and play one Marlin while the crew on board *Eclipse* played the other. The dinghy became separated and was lost from view from *Eclipse*. The Skipper contacted Far North Radio for assistance in finding the dinghy. The dinghy was found by the crew of *Eclipse* before dark.

1. KEY EVENTS

- 1.1 On 5 March 2004, at about 0700 hours, *Eclipse* departed Hokianga bound for Houhora.
- 1.2 *Eclipse* crossed Hokianga Bar at High Water (HW 0911 hours). The sea was not breaking on the bar.
- 1.3 Commenced game fishing using two rods. The Mate was using one of the rods, Crewmember 1 was using the other. The Skipper was in command.
- 1.4 At about 1415 hours, while game fishing, two Marlin were caught at the same time (a double strike). The Marlin attempted to swim away from the *Eclipse* in opposite directions, the one on Crewmember 1's line swimming towards the East, the one on The Mate's line swimming towards the West.
- 1.5 At approximately 1420 hours, both the Mate and Crewmember 1 had only a small amount of line left on their reels. The Mate suggested that he put the aluminium dinghy in the water and play his Marlin from that while Crewmember 1 played his Marlin from aboard *Eclipse*.
- 1.6 The Skipper put the aluminium dinghy into the water and led it around the stern by the painter. By the time he had done this there was very little line showing on the reels. The Mate boarded the dinghy, and the painter was let go immediately, as his line would have parted.
- 1.7 The Skipper entered the position that the dinghy was put into the water on the GPS as a Waypoint, it was 35° 13' South 172° 32'.25 East.
- 1.8 The crew of *Eclipse* tried to keep the dinghy in sight, but it disappeared from view while trying to land the Marlin on board, and The Mate moving in the opposite direction while trying to catch his Marlin.
- 1.9 At about 1530 hours, the Marlin being caught by *Eclipse* got away, in a position about 2.5 miles to the East of the position from where the dinghy had been put into the water.
- 1.10 After losing the Marlin, the *Eclipse* returned to the position that the dinghy had been put in the water but could not see him.
- 1.11 At 1550 hours, the Skipper alerted Far North Radio (Coastguard Radio) on VHF 60 and informed them of the situation, that he could not see the dinghy, and that he required an aircraft to help find him. He then started to carry out a search, by steaming in circles about one mile wide, spiralling outward in a clockwise direction.

- 1.12** At 1858 hours, at the end of the second turn The Mate was sighted and picked up by the *Eclipse* in position 35° 11'.4 South 172° 30.17' East. He was unharmed.
- 1.13** When the Mate was clear of the *Eclipse* and in the aluminium dinghy, he realised that he did not have any safety equipment on board, and that it was too late to return to *Eclipse* to get any.
- 1.14** After the aluminium dinghy was clear of *Eclipse* the Mate pulled in about 1 000 metres of line, to within about 100 metres of the Marlin.
- 1.15** The aluminium dinghy moved westwards. The Mate turned the dinghy beam on to that direction to slow the rate of movement, The Marlin tired.
- 1.16** At about 1600 hours, the Mate decided that the Marlin had had enough, and reeled it in. It shook it a few times and it died. He attached the dinghy painter to the Marlin, with a clove hitch around the bill. It floated vertically in the water spear up.
- 1.17** At about 1610 hours, the Mate pulled the Marlin over the stern of the dinghy. He secured the trace by passing it through the gill plates and tying it off. He saw *Eclipse* manoeuvring and thought he was still playing his fish, then he realised that they were looking for him, and having some trouble finding him because of the prolonged circling.
- 1.18** At about 1615 hours, the Mate put the Marlin back in to the water with the intention of using it as an anchor. Instead of sinking, it remained afloat, belly up, so he used it as a sea anchor instead.
- 1.19** At about 1620 hours, the Mate checked the anal vent to see if he could release any air or gas, but with no success. This was easy to do along side the dinghy, as the marlin floated belly up.
- 1.20** At about 1630 hours, the Mate observed an aircraft flying close by. He took his shirt off and waved the white of his shirt at the aircraft. He also tried to reflect the sun's rays off his reel in the direction of the aircraft, but he was not seen from the aircraft. He could also see another vessel looking for him towards the North.
- 1.21** At about 1800 hours, the Marlin sank, so the Mate let it sink to the seabed, and used it as an anchor on 700 metres of line.
- 1.22** At about 1830 hours, *Eclipse* approached the Mate from a Westerly direction and picked him up. At the time he was being picked up he could see another couple of boats. One was coming straight toward him and would have found him also.

- 1.23** At 1550 hours, Far North Coastguard Radio received call from *Eclipse* asking for a plane to help locate the missing dinghy. The Skipper of *Eclipse* agreed to pay for the plane. He advised he was not concerned about the safety of the person on board, but just wanted help finding him
- 1.24** At 1555 hours, Far North Coastguard Radio telephoned Kaitaia Aeroclub, no repl
- 1.25** At 1556 hours, Far North Coastguard Radio contacted Northland Coastguard Air Patrol who advised it would take 30 minutes to get airborne.
- 1.26** At 1600 hours, Far North Coastguard radio contacted Kaitaia Aeroclub (Blue Scenic Air), advised aircraft would be airborne as soon as possible.
- 1.27** At 1602 hours, Far North Coastguard radio contacted *Eclipse* and informed them that a plane was activated, and did he want Coastguard Air Patrol also. Advised that Coastguard Air Patrol was not needed.
- 1.28** At 1605 hours, Coastguard Air Patrol cancelled.
- 1.29** At 1620 hours, Far North Coastguard radio called *Eclipse* and concerned the dinghy would not be found before nightfall, so should they call for Police assistance? *Eclipse* agreed.
- 1.30** At 1623 hours, responsibility was taken over by the Police once contacted by Far North Coastguard Radio.
- 1.31** At 1624 hours, Aircraft from Kaitaia Aeroclub airborne.
- 1.32** At 1638 hours, Aircraft from Kaitaia Aeroclub over the water.
- 1.33** At 1703 hours, Aircraft from Kaitaia Aeroclub in search area.
- 1.34** At 1712 hours, Far North Coastguard Radio telephoned Kaitaia Police, as concerned about completing rescue before sunset and suggested a helicopter.
- 1.35** At 1735 hours, Police made decision to activate Northland Coastguard Air Patrol.
- 1.36** At 1738 hours, Northland Coastguard Air Patrol were contacted again.
- 1.37** At 1744 hours, Kaitaia Aeroclub plane returned to airport. No sign of dinghy.
- 1.38** At 1758 hours, Northland Coastguard Air Patrol was fully crewed, their operation room manned, and were attempting to obtain instruction.
- 1.39** At 1810 hours, Pan Pan message put out on Ch 16

- 1.40** At 1820 hours, Northland Coastguard Air Patrol received instructions from Kaitaia Police. The pilot informed the Kaitaia Police that because of the time and the likelihood of the search going on beyond civil twilight, that they would go only if this was an emergency. Kaitaia Police confirmed that this was an emergency.
- 1.41** At 1829 hours, Pan Pan message put out on Ch 16.
- 1.42** At 1846 hours, Maritime radio telephoned Far North Coastguard Radio and offered to take over the Pan Pan, on channel 16. The offer was accepted.
- 1.43** At 1849 hours, Far North Coastguard radio informed that Eclipse can see dinghy
- 1.44** At 1850 hours, Northland Coastguard Patrol nearly over the water, heard that dinghy found, returning to Kerikeri
- 1.45** At 1855 hours, *Eclipse* advised Far North Coastguard Radio that it definitely was the dinghy at position 35° 12.3' S 172° 29.45' E. The Far North Coastguard Radio operator was still in contact with the Whangarei Police and advised him that the dinghy had been found and he then stood down the helicopter, which had just lifted off in Whangarei.
- 1.46** At 1858 hours, *Eclipse* advised Far North Coastguard radio dinghy and fisherman safe and well, and on board.

2. KEY CONDITIONS

- 2.1 The Skipper was in command and navigated the vessel. The Mate kept a watch on the navigation in case something untoward should occur.
- 2.2 The weather conditions were excellent, with an excellent forecast. It was a calm day with little or no wind. There was a low swell of about 0.5 metres from the south, or south west and bright sunshine and clear.
- 2.3 Before departure, weather forecasts were obtained. These were normally obtained by the Skipper from the Computer, from the radio, or, if at sea, from Weatherfax.
- 2.4 The line on the rod being used by the Mate was about 1 200 metres in length. The line on the rod used by Crewmember 1 was about 1 500 metres in length.
- 2.5 There was only a small amount of time between putting the aluminium dinghy in the water and the Mate boarding it, leaving insufficient time to consider taking any safety equipment, especially taking into consideration that two Marlin were being played at the same time. Also that they were in danger of losing their lines, the Skipper had expected to equip the dinghy with safety equipment before he let it go, but did not have the opportunity.
- 2.6 The Mate was wearing a shirt which was green on the outside and white on the inside. He used this to attempt alert the aircraft, without success.
- 2.7 The aluminium dinghy was a Fyran 2.6 metre dinghy. It had three thwarts, each with buoyancy underneath. It had no engine, being propelled by oars. No equipment was kept in the dinghy. When not in use the dinghy was kept on the aft deck of *Eclipse*.
- 2.8 When *Eclipse* started searching for the dinghy, they started going toward the east because they had seen echoes on the radar. These turned out to be false echoes.
- 2.9 While the crew on board *Eclipse* was searching for the dinghy they saw the aircraft searching a couple of times, but did not take much notice of it as they were concentrating on their own search.
- 2.10 The dinghy was not sighted on the vessel's radar at any time, although the aircraft was.

- 2.11** Striped Marlin when caught normally stay comparatively close to the boat and are easier to land. Blue marlin are very unpredictable and put up a much greater fight. It was the first time that a Blue Marlin had been caught on the West Coast. The Blue Marlin has a shorter bill and has white flesh, the striped marlin has a longer bill, and red flesh. The Mate initially thought that the fish he had caught was a Striped Marlin. He was surprised when he had found that he had moved a further distance than he would have expected, and that he had actually caught a Blue Marlin.
- 2.12** The Skipper considered that the Operator at Far North Coastguard Radio did an excellent job. Some improvements could be made. The aircraft took some time to arrive, and when it did it appeared not to be working in the area that it had been advised to. It flew very close to the dinghy and did not see it. The Northland Coastguard Helicopter also had difficulty getting a crew.
- 2.13** But for the clement conditions occasion, neither the Skipper or the Mate would have considered putting the dinghy into the sea.
- 2.14** With the combination of the Mate pulling in the 1 000 metres of line, and the Marlin swimming towards the west, the dinghy moved slowly away from the position that it had been put into the water.
- 2.15** Because he was moving towards the west, the Mate considered cutting the line, but decided not to, as the fish was tiring a lot, especially after turning the dinghy beam on to the direction in which it was swimming.
- 2.16** While *Eclipse* was circling and looking for the Mate, the Mate could see him about 80% of the time, but on the larger circles when he was furthest away, towards the east, he lost sight of him for a while.
- 2.17** The Marlin caught by the Mate was a Blue Marlin of 120 Kgs weight.
- 2.18** The Mate was not concerned for his safety at any time. The weather was very good; he is a good swimmer and he trusted the Skipper's judgement through experience.
- 2.19** This was the first time that the Mate had taken to a dinghy after a double strike.
- 2.20** The Mate considered that the people concerned in the search and rescue from ashore were very willing, but that they needed some fine tuning.

3. CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

N.B. These are not listed in order of importance.

- 3.1 While game fishing they had a double strike of Marlin which proved difficult to bring on board.
- 3.2 Very good, and calm weather conditions.
- 3.3 The decision to use the dinghy to catch one Marlin while the *Eclipse* caught the other.
- 3.4 The dinghy being launched and taken away very quickly due to the heat of the moment.
- 3.5 No safety equipment, or communication equipment being put on board the dinghy.
- 3.6 The dinghy moving away from its launching position due to the Marlin swimming westward.
- 3.7 *Eclipse* moving away from the dinghy launching position due to the other marlin swimming eastward.
- 3.8 *Eclipse* moving out of sight of the dinghy.
- 3.9 The sun setting, making it difficult to see the dinghy from eastward.
- 3.10 The target of the dinghy not showing on the radar.
- 3.11 Spurious echoes on the radar, causing the search to be commenced towards the East of the launching position.
- 3.12 Northland Coastguard Air Patrol having difficulty getting an air crew. The aircraft used from Kaitaia Aero Club flying close to, but not sighting the dinghy.

4. CAUSE

Human Factor

<input type="checkbox"/> Failure to comply with regulations	<input type="checkbox"/> Drugs & Alcohol	<input type="checkbox"/> Overloading
<input type="checkbox"/> Failure to obtain ships position or course	<input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue	<input type="checkbox"/> Physiological
<input type="checkbox"/> Improper watchkeeping or lookout	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> Ship Handling
<input type="checkbox"/> Misconduct/Negligence	<input type="checkbox"/> Error of judgement	

Environmental Factor

<input type="checkbox"/> Adverse weather	<input type="checkbox"/> Debris	<input type="checkbox"/> Ice	<input type="checkbox"/> Navigation hazard
<input type="checkbox"/> Adverse current	<input type="checkbox"/> Submerged object	<input type="checkbox"/> Lightning	<input type="checkbox"/> Other . . .

Technical Factor

<input type="checkbox"/> Structural failure	<input type="checkbox"/> Wear & tear	<input type="checkbox"/> Steering failure
<input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical failure	<input type="checkbox"/> Improper welding	<input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate firefighting/lifesaving
<input type="checkbox"/> Electrical failure	<input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate maintenance	<input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient fuel
<input type="checkbox"/> Corrosion	<input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate stability	<input type="checkbox"/> Other . . .

- 4.1** The decision to use the dinghy to catch one Marlin while the *Eclipse* caught the other Marlin.
- 4.2** No safety equipment, or communication equipment on board the dinghy. *Eclipse* moving out of visual contact with the dinghy.

5. OPINIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Opinions

- 5.1** In this instance, instead of putting the dinghy in the water to play the Marlin, it would have been more prudent to cut the line on one of the Marlin and play the other.
- 5.2** When the Skipper of *Eclipse* had returned to the position that he had left the dinghy and could not locate him, he called Northland Coastguard Radio to get an aircraft to assist. At this stage if he felt he required such assistance he should have given a Pan Pan Message.
- 5.3** When Northland Coastguard Air Patrol, based at Kerikeri, were initially asked to assist in locating the dinghy, it was not considered urgent as no Distress or Pan message had been given. As the crew were at other places of work, they were reluctant to help search as it was not being treated as an emergency.
- 5.4** The Aircraft used to search for the dinghy from Kaitaia Aero Club failed to locate the dinghy. Visibility from a fixed wing aircraft due to its forward movement and positions of the windows is not as efficient as a helicopter. This aircraft is a tourist plane which is not always manned, unless booked. Some delay may be expected in locating the air crew for this aircraft, as it is not always readily available.
- 5.5** The Operator at Far North Coastguard Radio did a very good job in communicating with *Eclipse* and making the necessary arrangements ashore. However she did take a lot of responsibility. If something untoward had occurred she would undoubtedly have taken some of the blame. The Operator knows all the local people in the area and who would be best suited for a job when any assistance is required, so it would be a retrograde step not to use her input. However, she should not be allowed to take full responsibility when she is involved with search and rescue. Coastguard should work alongside her and give her any training and cooperation she may require. They should also bear in mind that she is a sole operator, who is very good at doing the “Hands On” work, and should not be burdened with paperwork more than is necessary.

Recommendations

- 5.6** That no legal action be taken against the Skipper of *Eclipse*. That he be warned that if a similar situation should re-occur he should cut the line. In any event, if the dinghy should become separated from the *Eclipse* and in such a position that he cannot find it, a “Pan Pan” message be given immediately.

5.7 That Coastguard liase with the Operator at Far North Coastguard Radio and Maritime Radio to train and assist her and share responsibility.