

Accident Report

Unnamed Kayak

Fatality

Te Tii Point, 2km North of Russell on
20 February 2004

KEEPING YOUR SEA SAFE FOR LIFE



Maritime Safety

MARITIME SAFETY AUTHORITY OF NEW ZEALAND
Kia Maanu Kia Ora



REPORT NO: 04 1079

VESSEL NAME: UNNAMED KAYAK

CASUALTY DETAILS:

Date of Casualty: 20 February 2004

Time of Casualty: 1400 hours New Zealand Daylight Time (NZDT)

Casualty Type: Fatality

Casualty Location: Te Tii Point, 2km North of Russell

Weather Forecast Area: Brett

Investigator: Jim Lott
Nautical Advisor Recreational Boating



REPORT NO: 04 1079

VESSEL NAME: UNNAMED KAYAK

VESSEL DETAILS:

Ship Name: *Unnamed Kayak*

Ship Category: Recreational Kayak/Canoe



SUMMARY

Two men were out kayaking when their kayaks capsized in high winds. One man swam for at least two hours before he made it ashore and raised the alarm. The body of the second man was found later.

1. KEY EVENTS

- 1.1** On Friday 20 February 2004, Kayaker 1 and Kayaker 2 borrowed two kayaks to go fishing in the Bay of Islands.
- 1.2** At about 1400 hours New Zealand Daylight Time (NZDT), the two men departed from Wairoa Bay and unsuccessfully snorkel-dived for kina in the shallows over Brampton Bank. They then baited their fishing rods and paddled further out over the bank, which stretches about 1.5 miles from shore.
- 1.3** As they left the shelter of Wairoa Bay they became increasingly exposed to the strong offshore wind and increasing waves. Conditions were squally, and the men became separated by about 200 metres.
- 1.4** A wave capsized Kayaker 2's kayak. He retrieved a car tyre inner tube and his snorkel and fins before the kayak sank.
- 1.5** Moments later, Kayaker 1's kayak capsized, further out to sea.
- 1.6** Kayaker 2 swam ashore and phoned the Police from a farmer's house.
- 1.7** At 1710 hours, an air and sea search was started.
- 1.8** At about 1900 hours, Kayaker 1's kayak was located, and shortly afterwards his body was found about two miles north east of Wairoa Bay. Drowning was subsequently found to be the cause of his death.

2. KEY CONDITIONS

- 2.1** The kayaks were borrowed from a relative of Kayaker 2. They were not fitted with buoyancy and were in poor condition. The plastic material that the kayakers were made from provided no buoyancy.
- 2.2** No lifesaving equipment or lifejackets were worn, but Kayaker 1 had a lifejacket on board his kayak. Kayaker 2 had an inner tube on board.
- 2.3** Kayaker 2, aged 46, was wearing a wet-suit. This provided some buoyancy that almost certainly assisted him in the long swim into the oncoming wind and sea to reach shore.
- 2.4** Kayaker 1, aged 45, was wearing a windbreaker and shorts.
- 2.5** It was found that Kayaker 1 had a level of THC in his blood. This indicates he had used cannabis earlier in the day. It was not possible to determine if he was affected by the drug at the time of his death.
- 2.6** No signalling equipment such as flares, or any other means of communicating their distress, was carried.
- 2.7** Each kayak was equipped with a wooden paddle. In the strong winds that were blowing that day, coupled with the men's lack of kayaking experience in strong winds, this was insufficient to control the kayakers and keep them head to wind.
- 2.8** The survivor described how they encountered sudden strong winds. The weather at the time was predicted to be strong, squally south-westerly winds. Just such conditions were encountered when the kayakers left the shelter of Wairoa Bay.
- 2.9** High Water springs was at 2040 hours. The incoming tide would have tended to increase the steepness of the waves.
- 2.10** As the men progressed over the bank and away from the shelter of the shore to windward, they experienced a rapid increase in the strength of the wind and the height of the waves. This quickly led to the capsizing of both kayakers as the wind and waves swept them towards Tapeka Point.
- 2.11** Both men were familiar with the inner Bay of Islands and were strong swimmers. They had been friends for many years.
- 2.12** Maritime Rule Part 91, Navigation Safety, and Northland Regional Council Navigation Safety Bylaws require every vessel to carry a suitable lifejacket for each person on board. Where there is any increased risk, lifejackets must be worn.

3. CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

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

- 3.1** The weather was windy and squally and not suitable for the trip the two men planned.
- 3.2** The kayaks were in poor condition and poorly equipped with inadequate paddles.
- 3.3** The men were not experienced in handling kayaks in the relatively rough conditions they experienced.
- 3.4** No proper lifesaving equipment was worn.
- 3.5** No means of communicating their distress was carried.
- 3.6** Once they had lost the ability to paddle against the waves, they had no equipment, such as an anchor, to hold the kayaks end on to the waves and stop being blown out to sea.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lack of knowledge	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ship Handling
<input type="checkbox"/> Misconduct/Negligence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Error of judgement	<input type="checkbox"/> Other . . .

Environmental Factor

<input checked="" 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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other . . .

NB. Technical Factor Other = Inadequate Paddles

- 4.1** The kayaks capsized when blown out to sea after the men lost control of their craft.
- 4.2** Kayaker 1 drowned because he was not wearing a lifejacket and because they failed to take any means of communicating distress.

5. OPINIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1** The borrowed kayaks were not suitable for anything other than close inshore use in calm conditions.
- 5.2** It was fortunate that Kayaker 2 was wearing a wet-suit. Without this he probably would not have survived.
- 5.3** Each year small boat capsizes result in several persons drowning. Most of these deaths would be avoided if the persons on board chose to wear a lifejacket.
- 5.4** Although wearing a lifejacket will considerably improve the chances of survival following an accident such as a capsize, if there is no means of informing others that rescue is needed, fatalities are almost inevitable. Inexpensive means of communicating distress from dinghies and kayaks include red hand flares, an orange distress flag, and keeping a cell phone sealed in a plastic bag. Cell phones and VHF marine radios can be used without loss of signal strength or clarity while still in a plastic bag.
- 5.5** Winds blowing out from the shore are very deceptive. The water is always very calm inshore, but a short distance from land the wind can generate short, steep waves that are dangerous in relation to small boats. In this tragic accident, both men quickly found themselves in a situation out of their control. They were blown seawards by the strong wind into bigger and bigger waves, and they could not manage to keep the kayaks end- on to the sea. Capsize was inevitable. The kayaks had no built in buoyancy and were of no assistance once full of water.
- 5.6** Kayaker 2 saw his friend capsize further out to sea and swam to shore for assistance. In the circumstances, if Kayaker 2 had chosen to go to the aid of Kayaker 1, it is very likely both men would have perished.
- 5.7** It is recommended that the Maritime Safety Authority and Regional Councils continue to use all means and resources available to promote safety awareness to small boat users. As well as the use of lifejackets, the importance of using marine weather forecasts in conjunction with careful observation cannot be overemphasised when planning a trip. Even with the most careful planning, accidents will continue to occur and having a means to communicate distress is essential on board every boat.
- 5.8** It is recommended that the Education and Communications Division of the MSA consider the inclusion of this report in the next edition of the Recreational Accidents Report book.