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**REPORT OF INVESTIGATION
INTO FATAL INCIDENT
OFF CARRAROE, CO. GALWAY
ON
30th MAY 2010**

The Marine Casualty Investigation Board was established on the 25th March, 2003 under the Merchant Shipping (Investigation of Marine Casualties) Act, 2000.

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**REPORT No. MCIB/187
(No. 01 of 2011)**



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14th January 2011

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1. SYNOPSIS

- 1.1 On Sunday 30th May 2010, at approximately 12.00 hrs., Mr. Padraig O’Cualain left Doire Fhearta Mór, Carraroe, Co. Galway in his 18 ft. timber, outboard engine powered currach to go fishing for mackerel in Greatman’s Bay. Sometime later, he was heading north up the bay past Calladh Thaigue, Carraroe when he fell overboard. His empty boat was spotted from ashore. His brother, Mr. Seamus O’Cualain, and others put to sea to search for him and he was later found floating in the water. All times quoted as local time.

2. FACTUAL INFORMATION

2.1 Vessel Particulars:

Class of vessel:	Currach
LOA:	18'
Material:	Timber
Engine:	Outboard 15 hp
Owner:	Mr. Pádraig O'Cuailain, Carraroe, Co. Galway

2.2 The currach was not named and displayed no identifying marks.

2.3 The weather at the time was good with a light northerly breeze and slight swell. Visibility was good but poor in rain. See Met Éireann report at appendix 8.4.



Photograph of Mr. Pádraig O'Cuailain's currach

3. EVENTS PRIOR TO THE INCIDENT

- 3.1 At approximately 12.00 hrs. on Sunday 30th May 2010, Mr. Pádraig O’Cualain left Doire Fhearta Mór, Carraroe, Co. Galway alone in his timber currach to go fishing for mackerel with line and feathers in Greatman’s Bay, Co. Galway.
- 3.2 Mr. Pádraig O’Cualain’s brothers, Michael and Seamus O’Cualain, and their sister, Mary O’Cualain, were concerned for his well being as he had been drinking the previous night and again that morning. They were observing Mr. O’Cualain from the beach at Dooleen at various times. At one point, he came into the beach and spoke with his sister who asked him to go home. He said he would do so, but instead went back out into the bay.
- 3.3 Mr. Maitiu Griffen was tending the fish farm in Greatman’s Bay. Whilst working on the fish farm, he had seen a currach going back and forth in the bay and recognised the man in the currach to be Mr. Pádraig O’Cualain. He appeared to be fishing. At approximately 15.30 hrs., he saw Mr. O’Cualain coming back up the bay, standing up in his currach.

4. EVENTS FOLLOWING THE INCIDENT

- 4.1 At approximately 15.35 hrs., Mr. Seamus O’Cualain returned to Dooleen beach and from a high vantage point could see Mr. Padraig O’Cualain’s currach going around in circles in the same place but could see no sign of Mr. Padraig O’Cualain in the boat. He called his brother, Mr. Michael O’Cualain, by mobile phone, with the news and drove to the pier at Chaladh Thaidhg, Carraroe, Co. Galway.
- 4.2 At approximately 15.35 hrs., Mr. Maitiu Griffen returned to the pier at Chaladh Thaidhg and tied his boat up. When he looked out into the bay again, he saw the currach approximately 200m SW of the pier, but no sign of Mr. Padraig O’Cualain. He saw Mr. Michael O’Cualain and his mother on the pier and asked them if it was Mr. Padraig O’Cualain in the currach he had seen. They told him that it was. Mr. Griffen got back into his own currach and went as far as Mr. Padraig O’Cualain’s boat. He looked inside the currach but there was no-one to be seen.
- 4.3 Mr. Griffen called his neighbour on his mobile phone and then at 15.42hrs., he called Valentia Coast Guard.
- 4.4 MRSC Valentia tasked the Costelloe Bay Coast Guard Unit, the Aran Island Lifeboat and rescue helicopter R118 (Sligo) as R115 (Shannon) was at another incident. R118 was then recalled by Malin Head Coast Guard and R116 (Dublin) was tasked to this incident. An ambulance was also requested to attend the scene by MRSC Valentia.
- 4.5 Mr. Seamus O’Cualain and Mr. Peadar O’Flaithearta went out in Mr. O’Flaithearta’s currach to search for Mr. Padraig O’Cualain. A number of other local men also joined in the search.
- 4.6 Mr. O’Flaithearta spotted Mr. Padraig O’Cualain floating in the water and he and Mr. Seamus O’Cualain pulled him into the currach. Mr. Padraig O’Cualain was not wearing a lifejacket. Mr. Seamus O’Cualain noted that Mr. Padraig O’Cualain’s body was cold and that he could not find a pulse. They returned to the pier at Chaladh Thaidhg and called a doctor and an ambulance.
- 4.7 The ambulance and doctor arrived on the scene shortly thereafter and attempts were made to resuscitate Mr. O’Cualain. These attempts proved unsuccessful and he was pronounced dead at 16.20 hrs. At 16.18 hrs., the Costelloe Bay Coast Guard Unit had arrived on the scene followed by the Aran Island Lifeboat at 16.23 hrs.
- 4.8 Mr. Padraig O’Cualain’s body was taken by ambulance to University College Hospital Galway.
- 4.9 The Costelloe Bay Coast Guard Unit, Aran Island Lifeboat and R116 were stood down by MRSC Valentia.

5. FINDINGS

- 5.1 Mr. O’Cualain was a very experienced boatman who knew the bay very well and had been fishing there for a large portion of his life.
- 5.2 Mr. O’Cualain was not wearing a lifejacket although there was one in the currach with him at the time. It is understood that he was normally in the habit of wearing one.
- 5.3 Mr. O’Cualain habitually stood in the stern when motoring so as to be able to see over the bow of the currach.
- 5.4 The post mortem report showed that Mr. Padraig O’Cualain died from asphyxia due to drowning.
- 5.5 The post mortem report showed that Mr. O’Cualain had 263 mg of alcohol in his blood and 342 mg of alcohol in his urine.
- 5.6 Weather was not a factor.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Whilst it is not possible to state definitively what occurred between the times that Mr. O’Cualain was seen fishing in his currach and the recovery of his body, it is considered likely that, possibly due to high levels of alcohol detected, he overbalanced while standing in the stern of his currach and fell over the side.
- 6.2 If Mr. O’Cualain had been wearing the lifejacket that was on board for him when he entered the water, it would, upon inflating, have turned him onto his back and kept his head above the water and increased his chances of survival.
- 6.3 In this instance, it was fortunate that a number of people were aware of the movements of Mr. O’Cualain. By observing him from the shore, it enabled a search by local people to be mobilised rapidly in advance of the arrival of the emergency services. The speed of this response ensured the quick recovery of Mr. O’Cualain’s body which might otherwise have been taken out to sea by the tide.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 It is recommended that:-

- persons on board a pleasure craft of less than 7m (23' 11") be reminded of the requirement to wear a suitable personal flotation device, as required by S.I. No. 921 of 2005, Pleasure Craft (Personal Flotation Devices and Operation) Regulations 2005,
- whilst there has recently been some highlighting of the requirement to use personal flotation devices on pleasure craft on the national airwaves, a campaign directed towards anglers using these craft for fishing be undertaken by the Department of Transport, with particular reference to the risks associated with standing whilst fishing from or operating a small craft,
- the Department of Transport further highlight the requirements of S.I. No. 921 of 2005, Pleasure Craft (Personal Flotation Devices and Operation) Regulations 2005 prohibiting the operation of pleasure craft by a person whilst under the influence of alcohol *"to such an extent as to be incapable of having proper control of the craft"*, and
- effective steps be taken to remind all persons that when proceeding to sea alone in a small craft, for whatever purpose, they should inform at least one person ashore of his/her intended movements and an expected time of return, which will allow the person ashore to raise the alarm with the emergency services in the event that they do not return by the appointed hour.

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APPENDIX 8.1

Appendix 8.1 View from Chaladh Thaidhg Pier looking west.

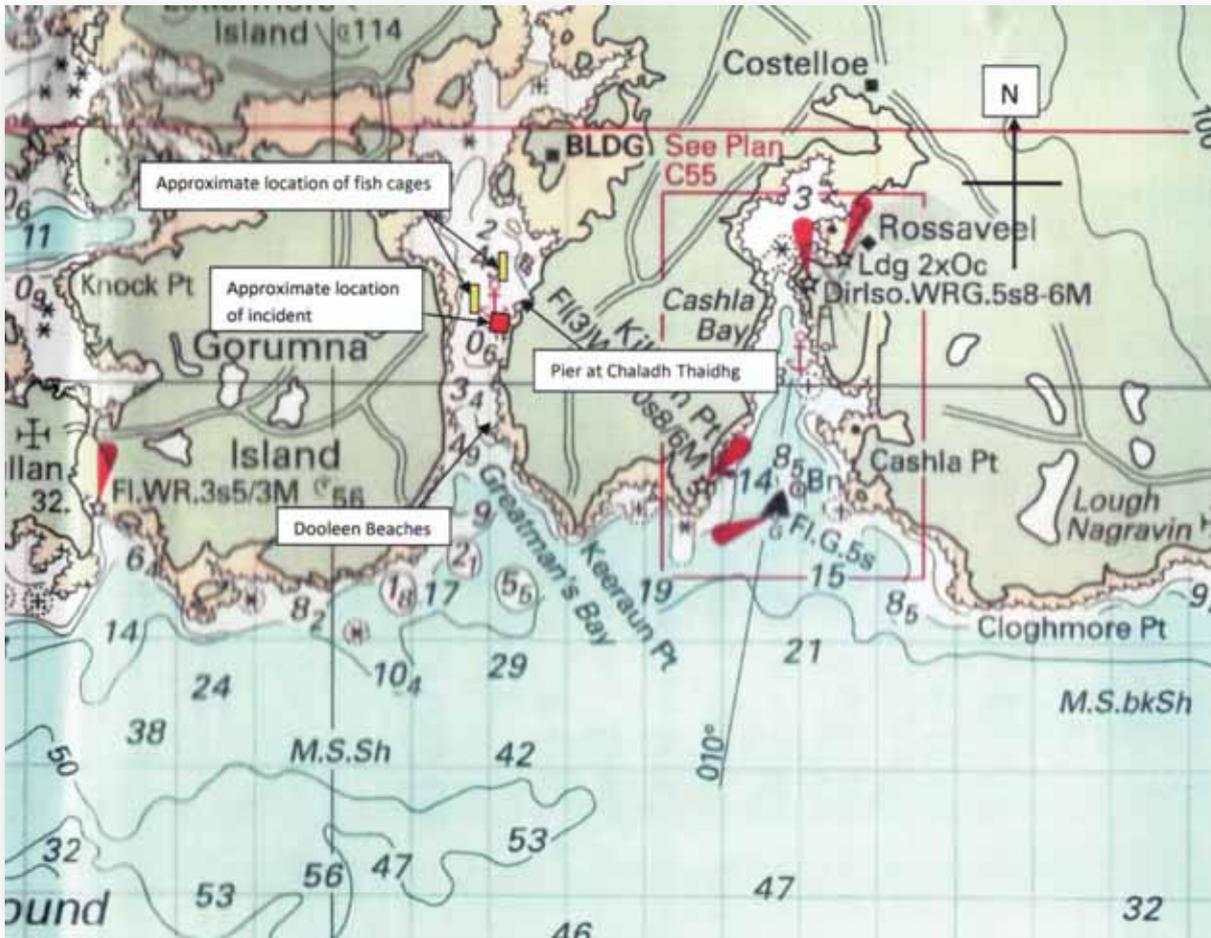


Appendix 8.2 View from Chaladh Thaidhg Pier looking south west.



APPENDIX 8.3

Appendix 8.3 Chart extract showing location of incident.



Appendix 8.4 Met Éireann Report.



MET ÉIREANN
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4/6/2010

Our Ref: WS 3018/2B_13694

Estimate of weather conditions in the sea area off the south Connemara coast, on the 30th May 2010, between 6 and 18 hours

General Situation

There was a slack airflow over the west and south coasts of Ireland in the morning. There was a deep depression in mid Atlantic, and associated frontal troughs moved eastwards over the south and west coasts in the morning. The troughs became slow moving in the area in the afternoon.

Details for the south Connemara sea area

6 to 12 hours

Winds: Light, Force 1 to 3, mainly from a southerly direction
Weather: some sunshine, but mostly cloudy and mostly dry
Visibility: good
Waves: Slight to Moderate

12 to 18 hours

Winds: Light, Force 1 to 3, variable mainly in direction.
Weather: rather cloudy, some outbreaks of rain and drizzle
Visibility: mostly good
Waves: Slight to Moderate

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



Appendix 8.4 Met Éireann Report.

Beaufort Scale of Wind					
Force	Description	Speed*		Specification -sea	Wave height** (metres)
		knots	km/hr		
0	Calm	<1	<1	Sea like mirror	
1	Light air	1-3	1-5	Ripples	0.1 (0.1)
2	Light breeze	4-6	6-11	Small wavelets	0.2 (0.3)
3	Gentle breeze	7-10	12-19	Large wavelets, crests begin to break	0.6 (1)
4	Moderate breeze	11-16	20-28	Small waves becoming longer, frequent white horses	1 (1.5)
5	Fresh breeze	17-21	29-38	Moderate waves, many white horses, chance of spray	2 (2.5)
6	Strong breeze	22-27	39-49	Large waves, white foam crests, probably some spray	3 (4)
7	Near gale	28-33	50-61	Sea heaps up, streaks of white foam	4 (5.5)
8	Gale	34-40	62-74	Moderately high waves of greater length	5.5 (7.5)
9	Strong gale	41-47	75-88	High waves, dense streaks of foam, spray may reduce visibility	7 (10)
10	Storm	48-55	89-102	Very high waves, long overhanging crests, visibility affected	9 (12.5)
11	Violent storm	56-63	103-117	Exceptionally high waves, long white foam patches cover sea	11.5 (16)
12	Hurricane	64+	117 & over	Air filled with foam and spray, sea completely white	14 (-)

*Speed a mean speed at a standard height of 10 metres.
 **Wave height is only intended as a guide to what may be expected in the open sea.
 Bracketed figures indicate the probable maximum wave height.

Wave Heights / State of Sea

The wave height is the vertical distance between the crest and the preceding or following trough. The table below gives a description of the wave system associated with a range of significant wave heights.

Sea State (Descriptive)	Significant Wave height in meters
Calm	0 – 0.1
Smooth(Wavelets)	0.1 – 0.5
Slight	0.5 – 1.25
Moderate	1.25 – 2.5
Rough	2.5 – 4
Very rough	4 – 6
High	6 – 9
Very high	9 – 14
Phenomenal	Over 14

Individual waves in the wave train will have heights in excess of the significant height. The highest wave of all will have a height about twice the significant height.

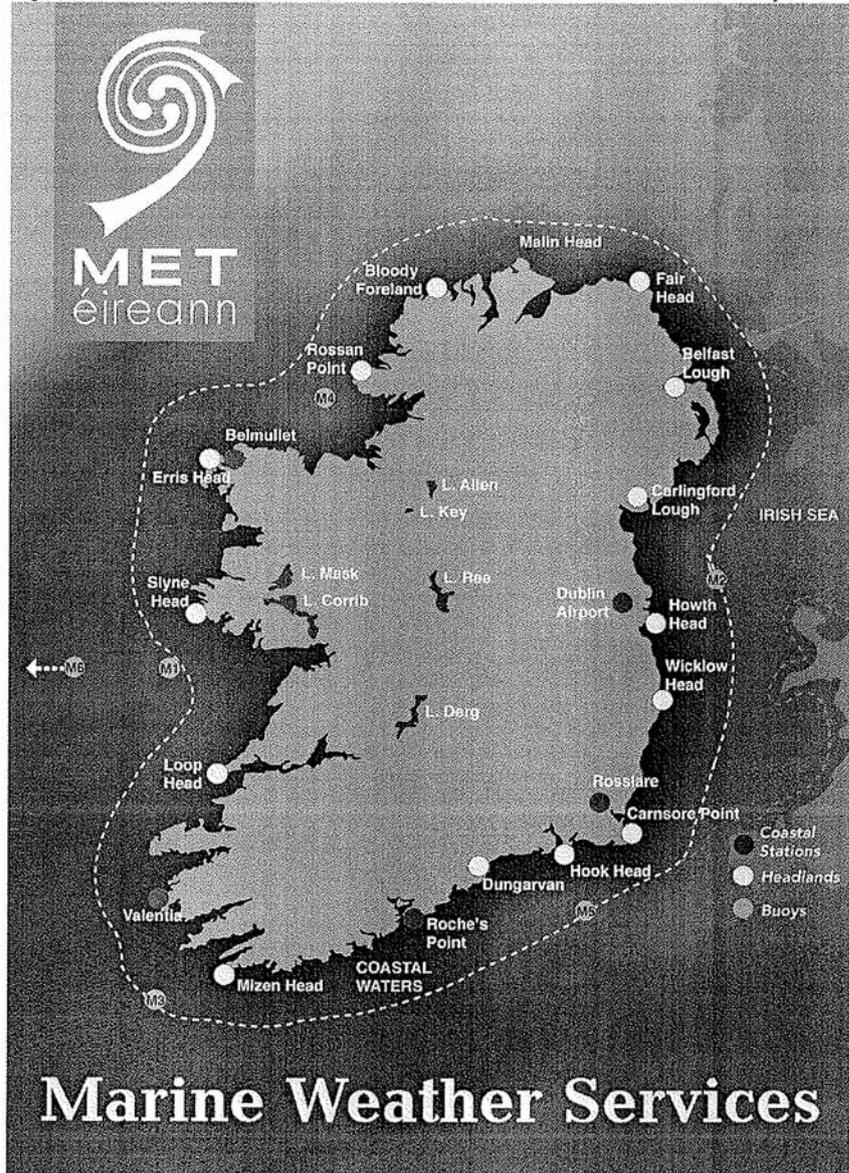
Visibility

Descriptions of visibility mean the following:

Visibility (Descriptive)	Visibility in nautical miles (kilometres)
Good	More than 5 nm (> 9 km)
Moderate	2 – 5 nm (4 – 9 km)

Appendix 8.4 Met Éireann Report.

Map of Ireland with Headlands, coastal stations and offshore weather buoys



12. CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

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An Garda Síochána

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OPS 79.13.10,
PS 713/10

MCIB Referenc : MCIB/187

Ms. Eve Reddin,
Secretariat,
Marine Casualty Investigation Board,
Leeson Lane,
Dublin 2.



Re: Marine Casualty Investigation Board – investigation into the fatal incident off the South Connamara Coast, Co. Galway on 30 May 2010, resulting in the death of Mr. Pádraig Ó Cualáin.

Dear Ms. Reddin,

I am directed by Deputy Commissioner, Operations to refer to previous correspondence from the Marine Casualty Investigation Bureau to the Commissioner in above matter, resting with minute dated 11th November, 2010.

I wish to advise that the draft report in relation to this incident has been reviewed and An Garda Síochána has no observations or submissions to make in respect of same.

Yours sincerely,



Frank Walsh
Superintendent for
Deputy Commissioner

14th December 2010

MCIB RESPONSE

The MCIB notes the contents of this correspondence.

