



20 October 2017

2017 Australian Search and Rescue Awards

Unflinching courage was the common thread that linked all three recipients of the 2017 Australian Search and Rescue Awards, which were held at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra on Thursday night (19 October 2017).

Presented by the National Search and Rescue Council, the annual awards recognise outstanding contributions by individuals and groups to search and rescue in Australia.

This year the recipients are:

- **Professional Search and Rescue Award** – New South Wales Police Force Marine Area Command *Nemesis* crew, who came to the rescue of two sailors whose yacht capsized off Sydney in one of the most publicised rescues of the year;
- **Non-professional Search and Rescue Award** – Port Phillip Bay fisherman Wayne Kelly, who saved the lives of three kayakers adrift in the bay with no lifejackets;
- **Commendation Award** – Western Australia Department of Fire and Emergency Service RAC Rescue helicopter 651 crew, who battled 90 km/hour winds and fading light to winch an injured cray fisherman in Israelite Bay to safety.

Australian Maritime Safety Authority Chief Executive Officer and National Search and Rescue Council Chair, Mr Mick Kinley, said the courage shown by this year's recipients was worthy of national recognition.

'These brave men came to the rescue of strangers without hesitation', Mr Kinley said, adding 'they were willing to place their lives on the line to ensure the safety of others, which is the very definition of heroism.'

'The tragic sinking of the fishing vessel *Dianne* off the coast of Queensland this week is a reminder of the importance of search and rescue and the sort of dangerous conditions that searchers are often expected to work in.'

The Council's members include the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, the Australian Defence Force, federal, state and territory police. Nominations for the annual search and rescue awards can be submitted directly to the National Search and Rescue Council [website](#).

Multimedia:

Photos from the 2017 Australian Search and Rescue Awards presentation at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra can be found [here](#).

Professional Search and Rescue Award 2017:

Two sailors, Irishman Nick Dwyer and Frenchwoman Barbara Heftman, were rescued from their stricken yacht almost 400km northeast of Sydney on 8 March 2017 in a joint operation between the New South Wales Police Force Marine Area Command and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA).

The sailors contacted AMSA on 4 March to report a broken rudder on their 40 foot yacht *Val*. Determined to complete their voyage from New Zealand to Australia, Nick and Barbara made makeshift steering arrangements.

Conditions worsened in the following days and at 3 pm on 7 March, the *Val* capsized in waves the size of buildings. Nick and Barbara activated their distress beacon, and a search and rescue operation was launched within minutes.

One of AMSA's dedicated Challenger search and rescue jets arrived on scene at 7 pm and made contact with the sailors via marine radio.

Hundreds of kilometres out to sea, the remoteness of their location presented unique challenges for a search and rescue operation. AMSA requested assistance from the NSW Police Force Marine Area Command in Sydney and the patrol vessel *Nemesis* was launched in under an hour with seven brave officers on board to rescue the sailors.

In six metre swells and gale force winds, the *Nemesis* crew were relentless in their efforts to reach Nick and Barbara before the *Val* capsized again.

At 8.30 am on 9 March, a fast rescue boat from the *Nemesis* recovered the sailors who were uninjured from their stricken yacht to the relief of everyone involved in the search and rescue operation.

Footage of the rescue operation can be downloaded [here](#).

Non-professional Search and Rescue Award 2017:

The initiative of a seasoned fisherman led to the rescue of three men from the water in Port Phillip Bay, Melbourne in November last year.

William (Wayne) Kelly found an upturned, unmanned kayak floating about 4km off the township of Mordialloc just before midday on 17 November 2016.

Without hesitation, Wayne contacted emergency services and began a search on his own for possible missing persons. Sea conditions were rough, with winds reaching 30 knots.

Within minutes of starting his search, Wayne located two men without lifejackets treading water not far from the abandoned kayak. They had spent an hour in the water attempting to swim the 4km to shore, and their efforts had left them severely fatigued and struggling to keep their heads above water.

The men alerted Wayne to a third person who was with them in the kayak before it capsized. After Wayne pulled them from the water into the safety of his boat, he resumed his search.

Less than 30 minutes later, he located the third missing man also treading water without a lifejacket.

If it wasn't for Wayne's quick thinking and actions, these three men might have drowned.

Commendation Award 2017:

A seriously injured cray fisherman was winched to safety on 6 November 2016 in high seas off Israelite Bay in Western Australia by the crew of Department of Fire and Emergency Services RAC Rescue helicopter 651.

Following a triple zero call and communications with Western Australia Police, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) tasked the rescue helicopter and its crew from Perth around 1 pm local time.

At the time of the rescue, the fishing vessel was located about 600km away in Israelite Bay, being buffeted by four to five metre seas and winds of up to 30 knots.

The patient, who was also the master of the fishing vessel, had sustained a life-threatening injury. The only other crew member on board was administering first aid and attempting to navigate the vessel in treacherous conditions.

In a remarkable feat, the RAC crew battled 90km/hr winds and fading light to arrive on scene and winch the patient off the vessel around 6.30pm.

With the nearest major trauma centre more than 250km away, AMSA arranged a refuelling stop for the helicopter in the remote town of Condingup about 60km east of Esperance.

A tractor and a trailer with fuel rendezvoused with the helicopter in a paddock in Condingup at 7.20 pm.

The patient was stabilised at Esperance Hospital at 9.20 pm, and later transferred by the Royal Flying Doctor Service to Royal Perth Hospital for further medical treatment.

View footage of the winch [here](#). To obtain a copy of the footage, contact the Department of Fire and Emergency Services Media team on (08) 9395 9543 or by emailing media@dfes.wa.gov.au.