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**REPORT OF INVESTIGATION  
INTO FATAL INCIDENT AT  
CULLENSTOWN,  
CO. WEXFORD  
ON  
7th SEPTEMBER 2010.**

**REPORT No. MCIB/190  
(No.10 of 2011)**



Report MCIB/190 published by The Marine Casualty Investigation Board  
Published 26th August 2011.

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## 1. SYNOPSIS

- 1.1 Mr. Michael O'Connor went fishing in the early hours of 7th September 2010 in a small open boat at Cullenstown, Co. Wexford. He failed to return home. His boat was found upturned and his remains were recovered later on the same day.

## 2. FACTUAL INFORMATION

### 2.1 Description of Vessel

The boat was a small GRP (Glass Reinforced Plastic) punt with buoyancy built in forward and aft. A single seat was fitted close to midship. The boat was not a registered fishing vessel.



### 2.2 Technical Specification

Boat maker:	Unknown
Material:	GRP
Length:	2.8m
Beam:	1.2m
Depth:	0.5m

### 2.3 Equipment

No equipment was found aboard or attached to the boat.

### 2.4 Persons onboard:

Mr. Michael O'Connor.

### 2.5 Tidal Information

7th September 2010 HW 05:30 LW 12:00.

### 2.6 Weather Conditions

The weather at the time of the incident was clear with southerly winds of up to Force 4. Sea-state was smooth with a maximum swell of 300mm. There were breaking waves on the Bar of Lough at Cullenstown, Co. Wexford. (See Met Éireann report, Appendix 8.3).

### 2.7 Location

The slipway where Mr. O'Connor departed from is located at 52° 13.05' N 06° 41.43' W. The Coal Yard is located at 52° 13.03' N 06° 41.35' W.

### 3. EVENTS PRIOR TO THE INCIDENT

- 3.1 Mr. O'Connor regularly used this boat to fish in the waters close to his home or to cross the waterway and walk to the Bar of Lough at Cullenstown to fish from its eastern shore.
- 3.2 The boat was kept at a small private slipway close to his home.
- 3.3 At 00.30 hrs. on 7th September 2010 Mr. O'Connor left home to go fishing alone. He did not return home as expected.
- 3.4 Mrs. O'Connor went to the slipway at 06.30 hrs. and on to Cullenstown at 07.00 hrs. where she met local fishermen who included a member of the local Coast Guard Unit. They carried out an initial search of the area and then raised the alarm.

## 4. THE INCIDENT

- 4.1 As there were no witnesses to the incident the Board is unable to fully determine as to why Mr. O'Connor fell overboard.



## 5. EVENTS FOLLOWING THE INCIDENT

- 5.1 The National Maritime Operation Centre (NMOC) Dublin launched a search operation involving:
  - Fethard Lifeboat
  - Kilmore Quay Coast Guard
  - Local People
  - Irish Coast Guard Helicopter R117 from Waterford
- 5.2 Kilmore Quay Coast Guard and local people carried out a search along the shore.
- 5.3 R117 was on training exercises and was diverted to the incident, arriving on scene at 08.45 hrs.
- 5.4 R117 located the upturned boat at 08.57 hrs. and it was inspected by the helicopter crew.
- 5.5 R117 located Mr. O'Connor's body at 09.06 hrs.
- 5.6 Fethard Inshore Lifeboat was towed to the scene by road and launched from the quay known as the Coal Yard, close to the slipway from where Mr. O'Connor departed. The lifeboat recovered Mr. O'Connor's boat and towed it to the Coal Yard where it was handed over to Kilmore Coast Guard.
- 5.8 Mr. O'Connor was pronounced dead at 16.10 hrs. at Cork University Hospital.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The tide was flooding when Mr. O'Connor went fishing.
- 6.2 The weather at the time of the incident was moderate with wind and waves that could influence a small boat of 2.8m in length. However, the investigation concluded that weather was not a factor.
- 6.3 Mr. O'Connor was wearing a life jacket at the time of the incident.
- 6.4 The boat was not a registered fishing vessel and thus was not surveyed in relation to regulations which set standards of safety and protection for persons on board small fishing vessels, of less than 15 metres length overall, which go to sea to fish for profit.
- 6.5 The boat was small and considered unsuitable to carry, set or tow heavy fishing gear.
- 6.6 The combination of boat size, darkness, weather conditions, tidal flow, fishing equipment and the absence of safety equipment other than a lifejacket combined to increase the danger and reduce the chance of survival.
- 6.7 There were no flares, VHF radio or other safety equipment found on board the vessel.
- 6.8 A net was found close-by with one end tied to a floating buoy on the north side of the waterway with the other end drifting in a westerly direction with the ebbing tide.
- 6.9 There was no detail available of the size or type of fishing net recovered. It is thought likely that this net was used by Mr. O'Connor on the night of the incident.
- 6.10 It is also thought likely that Mr. O'Connor shot a net in a southerly direction across the waterway with one end tied to a mooring close to the slipway on the north side.
- 6.11 It is not known how Mr. O'Connor came to be in the water.
- 6.12 The incident happened at night in the dark when Mr. O'Connor was fishing alone. There was no other boat or person in the area to provide assistance or to raise the alarm.
- 6.13 A post mortem examination was carried out which concluded that the cause of death was due to cardiorespiratory arrest due to drowning.

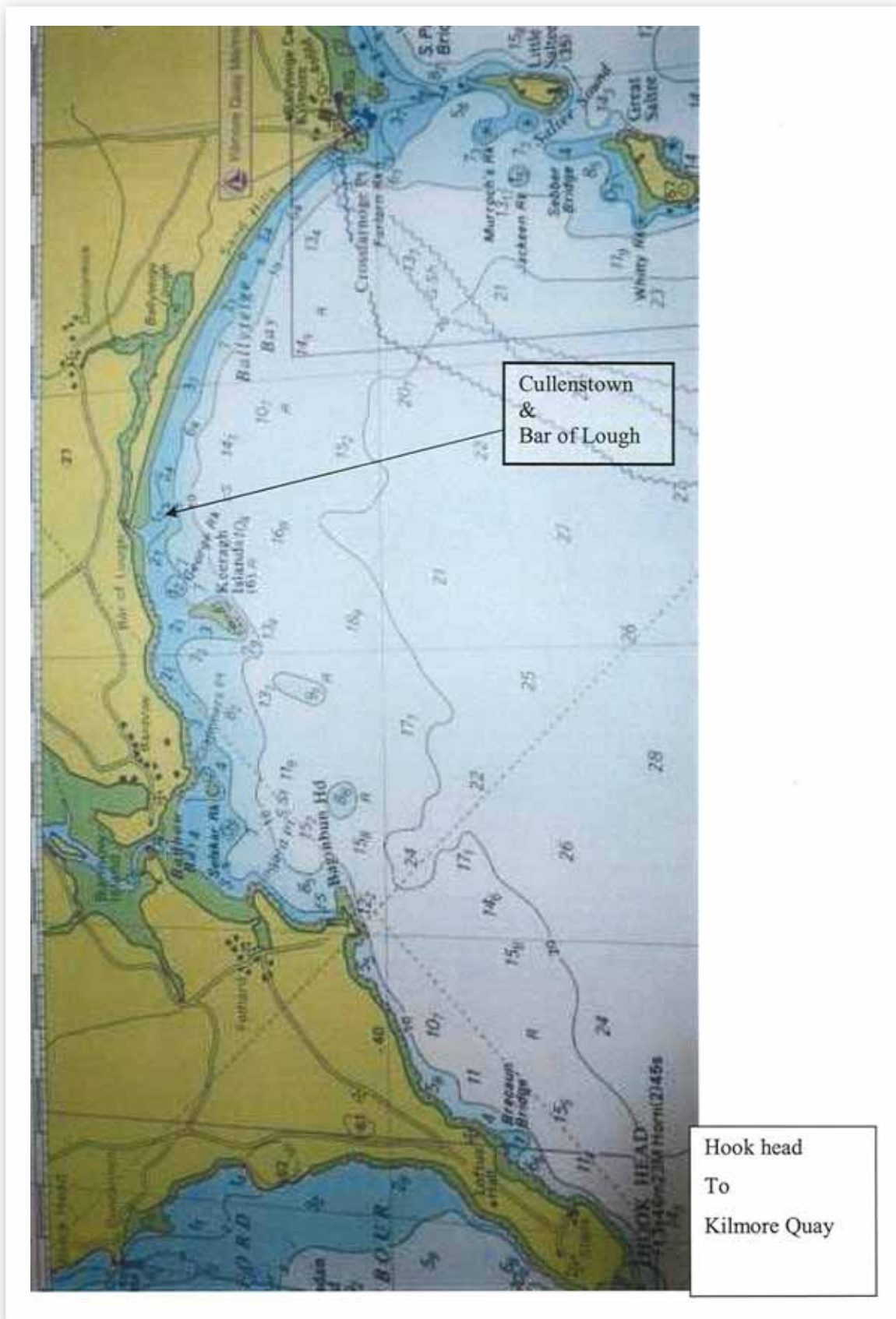
## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The Board recommends that the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport:-
- Continues to promote an awareness on the part of anglers and leisure boaters of the dangers of operating without adequate safety equipment, and
  - Promotes an awareness of and compliance with the *Code of Practice for the Safe Operation of Recreational Craft*. (See appendix 8.4).

## 8. LIST OF APPENDICES

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Appendix 8.1 Chart of area.



## APPENDIX 8.2

### Appendix 8.2 Aerial Photographs.



...e that the Bic Sports Kayak sit-on-top type Kayak is lodged firmly against the weir back flow after twelve



...o men re-entered the water then they were back.



Appendix 8.2 Aerial Photographs.



## Appendix 8.3 Met Éireann Weather Report.



**MET ÉIREANN**  
The Irish Meteorological Service

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Dublin 9, Ireland.

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15/9/2010

**Our Ref:** WS 3018/2C\_13794

**Estimate of weather conditions in the sea area off Cullenstown Beach, Co. Wexford, between 18 hours on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9 hours on the 7<sup>th</sup> September 2010.**

**Winds:** Moderate to Fresh, Force 3 to 5, mainly from a westerly direction

**Weather:** Isolated thundery showers in the area, but mostly dry and partly cloudy.

**Temperatures:** air temperatures 15°C and sea surface temperatures 16°C.

**Visibility:** mostly good, greater than 10 km, but moderate in rain/showers, 6 km.

**Waves:** Moderate to rough with Significant Wave Heights of 1.5 to 2 metres.

Observations from Buoy M5 at 51.7°N and 6.7°W

M5	date	Wind direction (degrees from north)	Wind speed (knots)	Highest gust (knots)	Air temperature (°C)	Sea temperature (°C)	sea period (seconds)	sea height (metres)
62094	06-sep-2010 18:00:00	240	15	20	16	16	6	2.1
62094	06-sep-2010 20:00:00	230	15	20	15.8	16	5	2
62094	06-sep-2010 21:00:00	240	14	20	15.7	16	5	1.9
62094	06-sep-2010 22:00:00	230	14	20	15.7	16	5	1.7
62094	07-sep-2010 00:00:00	230	15	19	15.7	15.9	5	1.6
62094	07-sep-2010 01:00:00	230	13	19	15.4	15.6	5	1.7
62094	07-sep-2010 02:00:00	260	6	16	15.1	15.5	5	1.5
62094	07-sep-2010 03:00:00	240	9	12	15.3	15.5	5	1.4
62094	07-sep-2010 04:00:00	260	8	12	15	15.6	5	1.5
62094	07-sep-2010 05:00:00	220	14	16	14.6	15.8	5	1.5
62094	07-sep-2010 06:00:00	230	14	17	14.9	15.9	5	1.6
62094	07-sep-2010 07:00:00	240	10	16	14.9	15.9	6	1.6
62094	07-sep-2010 08:00:00	250	11	15	15	15.9	5	1.5

**Evelyn Murphy B.Sc. M.Sc. Meteorologist**  
Climatology & Observations Div.  
Met Éireann





Appendix 8.3 Met Eireann Weather 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.

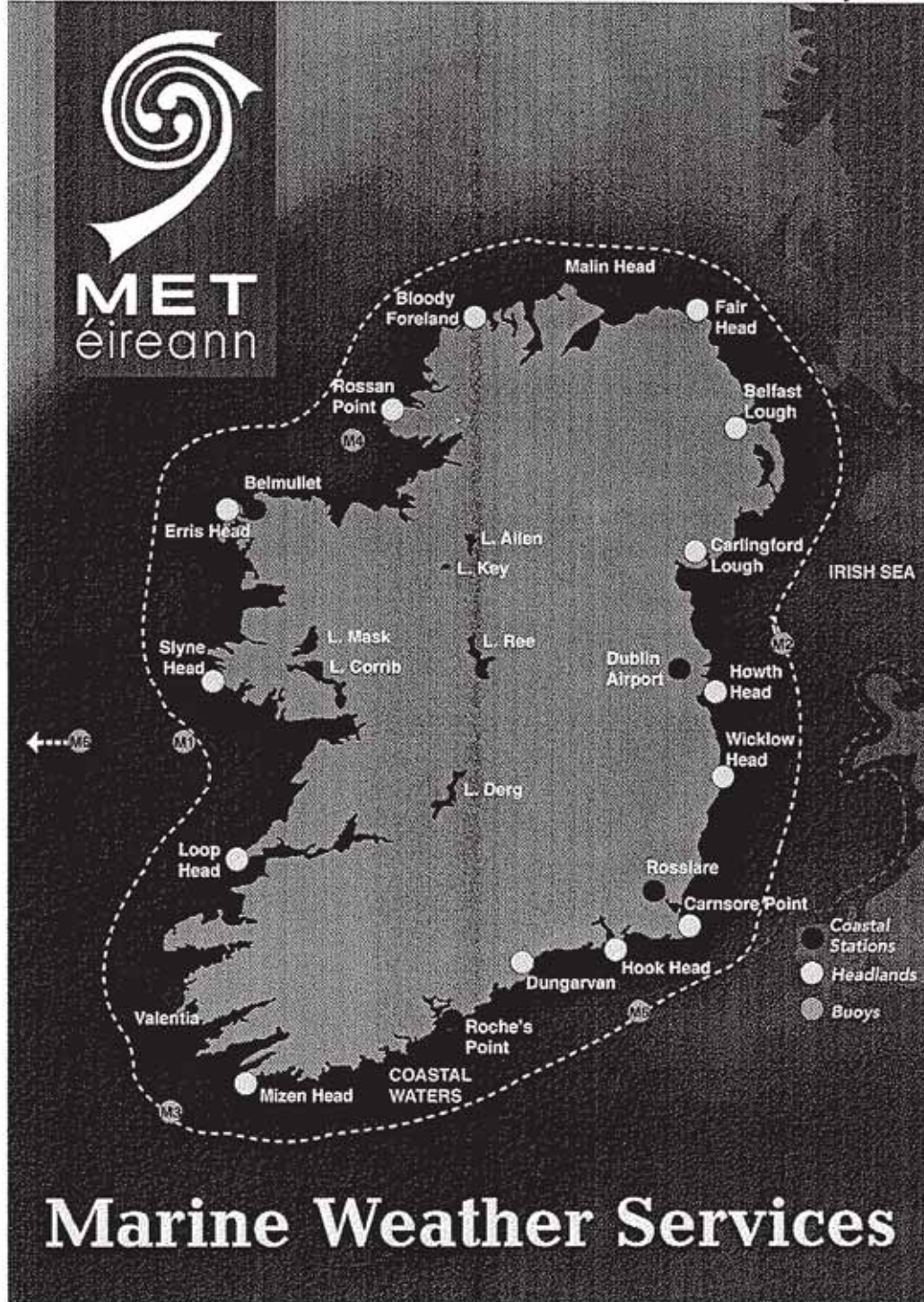
Visibility

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)
Poor	0.5 – 2 nm (1 – 4 km)
Fog	Less than 0.5 nm (< 1km)

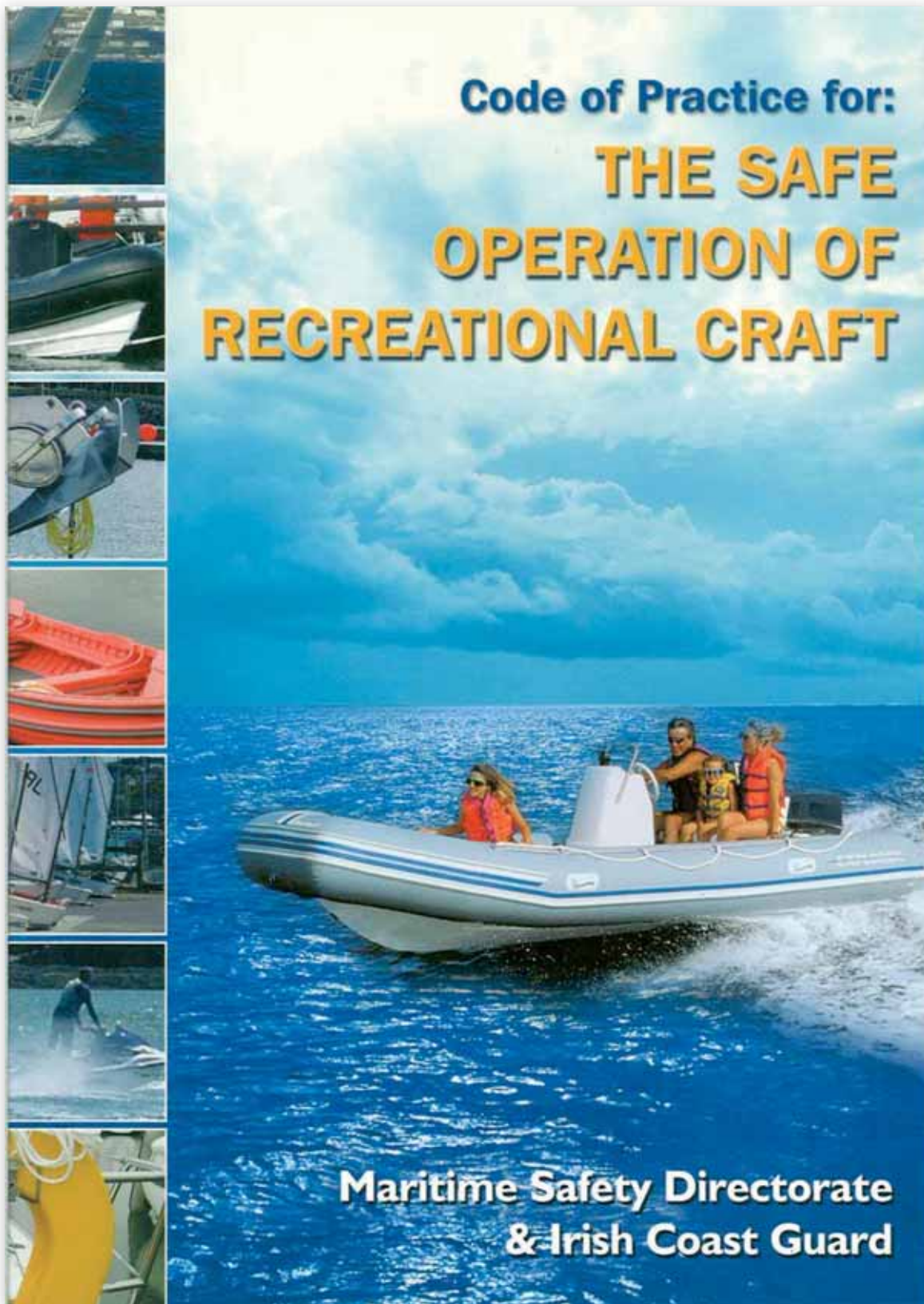
Appendix 8.3 Met Éireann Weather Report.

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





Appendix 8.4 Code of Practice for The Safe Operation of Recreational Craft.



## 9. CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

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## An Garda Síochána

An Leas-Choimisinéara  
(Oibríochtaí)  
An Garda Síochána  
Ceanncheathrú na nGardaí  
Páirc an Fhionn-Uisce  
Baile Atha Cliath 8



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*Please quote the following Ref. No.*

Deputy Commissioner  
(Operations)  
An Garda Síochána  
Garda Headquarters  
Phoenix Park  
Dublin 8

Web Site : [www.garda.ie](http://www.garda.ie)  
E-mail : [commissioner\\_ops@garda.ie](mailto:commissioner_ops@garda.ie)

OPS79.13/10  
PS 1061/10

Your Reference: MCIB/190

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



**Re: Draft Report of the Investigation into fatal incident at Cullenstown,  
Co. Wexford on 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2010.**

Dear Ms. Reddin,

I am directed by Deputy Commissioner, Operations to refer to previous correspondence from the Marine Casualty Investigation Board to the Commissioner in above matter, resting with minute dated 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2011.

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  
17<sup>th</sup> June 2011



Ráiteas Misín / Mission Statement :

Ag obair le Pobail chun iad a chosaint agus chun freastal orthu / Working with Communities to Protect and Serve

### MCIB RESPONSE

The Board notes the contents of this correspondence.



Our Ref: IRCG 22/52/2

31<sup>st</sup> May 2011.

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

Dear Eve,

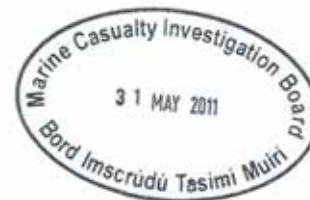
Re: Draft report of the Investigation into fatal incident at Cullenstown, Co. Wexford  
on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2010.

In addition to the recommendations at point 7 on the report, Irish Coast Guard would also like to recommend reference to Fishing Craft Safety Advice which can be found at [www.safetyonthewater.ie](http://www.safetyonthewater.ie).

At point 5.1, please replace "Marine Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC)" with "National Maritime Operation Centre (NMOC)" and at last bullet point replace "Rescue" Helicopter with "Irish Coast Guard" Helicopter.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Smith  
Irish Coast Guard



Administration Office, Irish Coast Guard, Department of Transport, Leeson Lane, Dublin 2, Ireland.  
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1

## MCIB RESPONSE

The Board notes the contents of this correspondence and has made the necessary amendments.



