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**REPORT OF INVESTIGATION  
INTO CASUALTY OFF  
DALKEY ISLAND  
CO. DUBLIN ON  
12th OCTOBER 2010**

**REPORT No. MCIB/192  
(No.12 of 2011)**



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## 1. SYNOPSIS

- 1.1 On the afternoon of 12th October 2010 Mr. Aidan Fennell departed from Coliemore Harbour with the intention of rowing out to Dalkey Island. When Mr. Fennell had not returned after one and a half hours the alarm was raised. The Dun Laoghaire Lifeboat and a rescue helicopter were tasked to search and subsequently the lifeboat found Mr. Fennell's boat washed up on the rocks on the South East side of Dalkey Island. A short time later the rescue helicopter located the casualty in the water just south of Dalkey Island and recovered him. Mr. Fennell was later pronounced dead at Tallaght Hospital.

Note all times are UTC.

## 2. FACTUAL INFORMATION

### 2.1 Description of Vessel

The vessel was an eleven foot clinker laid wooden punt. It was reported to have been built by Mr. Aidan Fennell, the deceased. It had two transverse thwarts and a seat around the transom aft.

NAME:	LEWIS
LOA:	11' 06" (3.5 metres)
BEAM:	4' 03" (1.3 metres)



### 2.2 Equipment (Observed after event)

One pair of wooden oars.  
 One pair of galvanised steel row locks.  
 One light plastic bucket.

### 2.3 People Involved

- 2.3.1 Mr. Fennell, aged 43 years and the owner of the vessel had been a boatman in the locality all his life carrying on a family tradition. He had reportedly built the wooden punt "LEWIS". He was a strong swimmer and had frequently swum over to Dalkey Island. Mr. Fennell had been an epileptic from birth. He still suffered from fits & convulsions, and was having about 1 to 2 minor fits per month and about 1 to 2 major "Grand Mal" incidents per year.

2.3.2 Mr. Kevin O'Farrell was a long time friend and acquaintance of Mr. Fennell. He occasionally helped Mr. Fennell with his boats. Mr. O'Farrell was present when Mr. Fennell launched his boat on October 12th and was the last person to speak to him. Mr. O'Farrell stated that Mr. Fennell was in good form. Mr. O'Farrell had told Mr. Fennell that he would await his return and help him to get his boat out of the water.

#### 2.4 Tidal Information at Dublin North Wall - 12th October 2010

High Water- Time 14:17 hrs, height 3.9m

Low Water - Time 20:08 hrs, height 0.9m

Tidal current in Dalkey Sound was a Strong South going tidal current up to 2.5 Knots.

#### 2.5 Sea and Weather Conditions

North Easterly winds force 2 to 3. Visibility good

Sea state smooth/wavelets with up to 0.6 metre waves.

#### 2.6 Time Line of Incident

Date: Tuesday 12th October 2010.

14:00 Mr. Fennell departed Coliemore Harbour.

15:32 Mr. O'Farrell called Irish Coast Guard and expressed his concern for Mr. Fennell.

15:35 Dun Laoghaire Lifeboat briefed and requested to launch.

15:40 Helicopter R116 was advised and tasked.

15:43 Dun Laoghaire Lifeboat launched.

15:53 R116 proceeding to search area.

15:58 Dun Laoghaire Lifeboat reported locating oars and boat matching description on the rocks at south end of Dalkey Island.

16:08 R116 locates body in water in position about 200 metres SE of Dalkey Island and commences winching.

16:13 R116 departs scene to Tallaght Hospital.

16:15 Dun Laoghaire Lifeboat recovered casualty's boat.

16:29 R116 landed at Tallaght Hospital, casualty handed over to A&E.

17:15 Dun Laoghaire Lifeboat returned to base with boat.

### 3. EVENTS PRIOR TO THE INCIDENT

- 3.1 On the afternoon of 12th October 2010 Mr. Fennell launched his boat from the slipway at Coliemore Harbour Co. Dublin.
- 3.2 Around 14:15 hrs he was going to ferry a German tourist and his three children out to Dalkey Island, however, the man fell into the water and they decided not to go. In this regard, Mr. Fennell had carried passengers in the past but his passenger licence had been withdrawn. The intending passengers had been equipped with lifejackets.
- 3.3 Mr. Fennell asked Mr. Kevin O'Farrell to help him pull his boat out of the water, but then decided he would row out to the Island on his own. Mr. O'Farrell said he would wait for him to come back and help him pull the boat out.
- 3.4 Mr. Fennell departed from Coliemore Harbour just before 14:30 hrs. He was not wearing a lifejacket or buoyancy aid.
- 3.5 Mr. O'Farrell went swimming with his friends but also kept an eye out for Mr. Fennell. The last time he saw Mr. Fennell was around 14:50 hrs after which he assumed that Mr. Fennell was on the East side of Dalkey Island, or had gone to shore in Killiney Bay or White Rock.

## 4. THE INCIDENT

- 4.1 Around 15:15 hrs Mr. O'Farrell became concerned as he expected Mr. Fennell to come into view but he had been out of sight for some time. He called the Coast Guard at 15:32 hrs expressing his concern.
- 4.2 The Coast Guard immediately tasked the Dun Laoghaire Lifeboat and Rescue Helicopter R116 to search the area around Dalkey Island.
- 4.3 At 15:58 hrs the Dun Laoghaire lifeboat located Mr. Fennell's boat washed ashore on the rocks at the SE end of Dalkey Island. Two oars were found in the water close by. Subsequent examination of the boat found minor damage to the skeg at the aft end, and the aft thwart was found to be loose and displaced.
- 4.4 At 16:08 hrs helicopter R116 located a body in the water in position 53° 16.2'N 006° 04.9'W (about one cable SE of Dalkey Island) and commenced recovery from the water.
- 4.5 At 16:13 hrs helicopter R116 departed from the scene to Tallaght Hospital.
- 4.6 At 16:29 hrs helicopter R116 landed at Tallaght Hospital, Mr. Fennell was handed over to A&E where he was pronounced dead.



**5. EVENTS FOLLOWING THE INCIDENT**

- 5.1 At 16:15 hrs the Dun Laoghaire Lifeboat commenced recovering Mr. Fennell's boat.
- 5.2 At 17:15 hrs the Dun Laoghaire Lifeboat returned to base with the boat.
- 5.3 The Gardaí commenced an investigation.
- 5.4 The Post mortem examination of Mr. Fennell's body found that death was due to drowning. There were no injuries consistent with a fall on or against rocks or hard objects.
- 5.5 At the coroner's inquest on 28th June 2011 an open verdict was given.

## 6. FINDINGS

- 6.1 The vessel was sturdily constructed and had suffered only minor damage. The skeg at the aft end of the keel was broken, but still attached to the boat and displaced to the starboard side. This damage appeared to be very recent and fresh. The aft seat around the transom was loose and had been displaced. The oar locks were secure in their positions on the gunwale.
- 6.2 Mr. Fennell was a strong swimmer and a competent boatman. He had also a medical condition which caused him to have epileptic episodes where he could not control his muscles, and where he lost sense with reality and occasionally became unconscious.
- 6.3 The sea conditions at the time were fair in the Dalkey sound, but moderate with waves up to 0.6 metres off the south end of Dalkey Island.
- 6.4 Mr. Fennell's body and the boat were recovered in close proximity to each other.
- 6.5 The time between the last confirmed sighting of Mr. Fennell at 14:50 hrs and the recovery of his body at 16:08 hrs was 1 hour and 18 minutes.
- 6.6 Prior to setting out, Mr. Fennell attempted to engage a tourist and his three children as fare paying passengers even though he had no licence to do so. Had this party boarded this small boat it would have been overloaded and unsafe.
- 6.7 As a result of the coroners examination it is his opinion that death was due to drowning.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 Mr. Fennell was a strong swimmer and a competent boatman well used to the waters. He was used to swimming in cold water. If he had fallen overboard it is considered likely that he could have swum to his boat, or clung on to the oars. However, if he had suffered an epileptic episode he may have fallen overboard and as such would have had great difficulty in staying afloat, in particular without having the buoyancy assistance of a life jacket.
- 7.2 The possibility that Mr. Fennell lost control of the boat (perhaps during an epileptic episode) and it was washed up on the rocks thus throwing him overboard is not supported by any injuries on the body. The recent damage observed on the boat was likely due to it being washed onto the rocks by the North going tide.
- 7.3 Mr. Fennell was not wearing any lifejacket or buoyancy aid. Had he been wearing one, his head would have been held above the water and his chances of survival would have been greatly increased.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 Owners of leisure craft should be aware of all of the current legislation and codes of practice which apply to them; it is recommended that they read and comply with:
- (a) The Code of Safe Practice for:  
THE SAFE OPERATION OF RECREATIONAL CRAFT.  
Pub by: Maritime Safety Directorate. ISBN 0-755772-34-2.
  - (b) The Maritime Safety Act 2005.
- 8.2 In all circumstances small craft should be equipped with appropriate safety equipment and, in particular, means of indicating distress.
- 8.3 Anyone setting out on the water should always notify a responsible person of their proposed route and return time. Such responsible persons who have failed to have contact or sighting with the vessel should not have any hesitation in raising the alarm by calling the Coast Guard after that time has elapsed.
- 8.4 Proceeding to sea alone is not recommended.
- 8.5 All persons proceeding on the water in small open craft of less than 7 metres LOA are required to wear a Personal Floatation Device (PFD) under the regulations in S.I. No. 921 of 2005. Persons proceeding on the water in small craft without wearing PFD's should be reported to the Gardaí or other responsible authority.
- 8.6 It is recommended that the Marine Survey Office, provide safety information to the public regarding the licensing of passenger boats.

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	(b) Damage to skeg.	
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## Appendix 9.1 Met Éireann Weather Report.



**MET ÉIREANN**  
*The Irish Meteorological Service*

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12/8/2011

*Our Ref.* WS3018/2C\_14235  
*Your Ref.* MCIB/192

**Estimate of weather conditions in the Dalkey Island sea area,  
on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2010, between 12 and 18 hours,  
at location 53° 16.2'N, 6° 4.9'W**

General Situation: There was a High Pressure area over Ireland giving a slack easterly airflow. There was good sunshine over most of Leinster. Some low cloud and lifted fog remained in the Irish Sea close to the coast

Details:

Winds: from a north-east to north-north-east direction, Force 3 occasionally Force 4

Weather: earlier fog had lifted to give a rather cloudy afternoon. Sunshine was breaking through in places.

Visibility: good, greater than 10 km

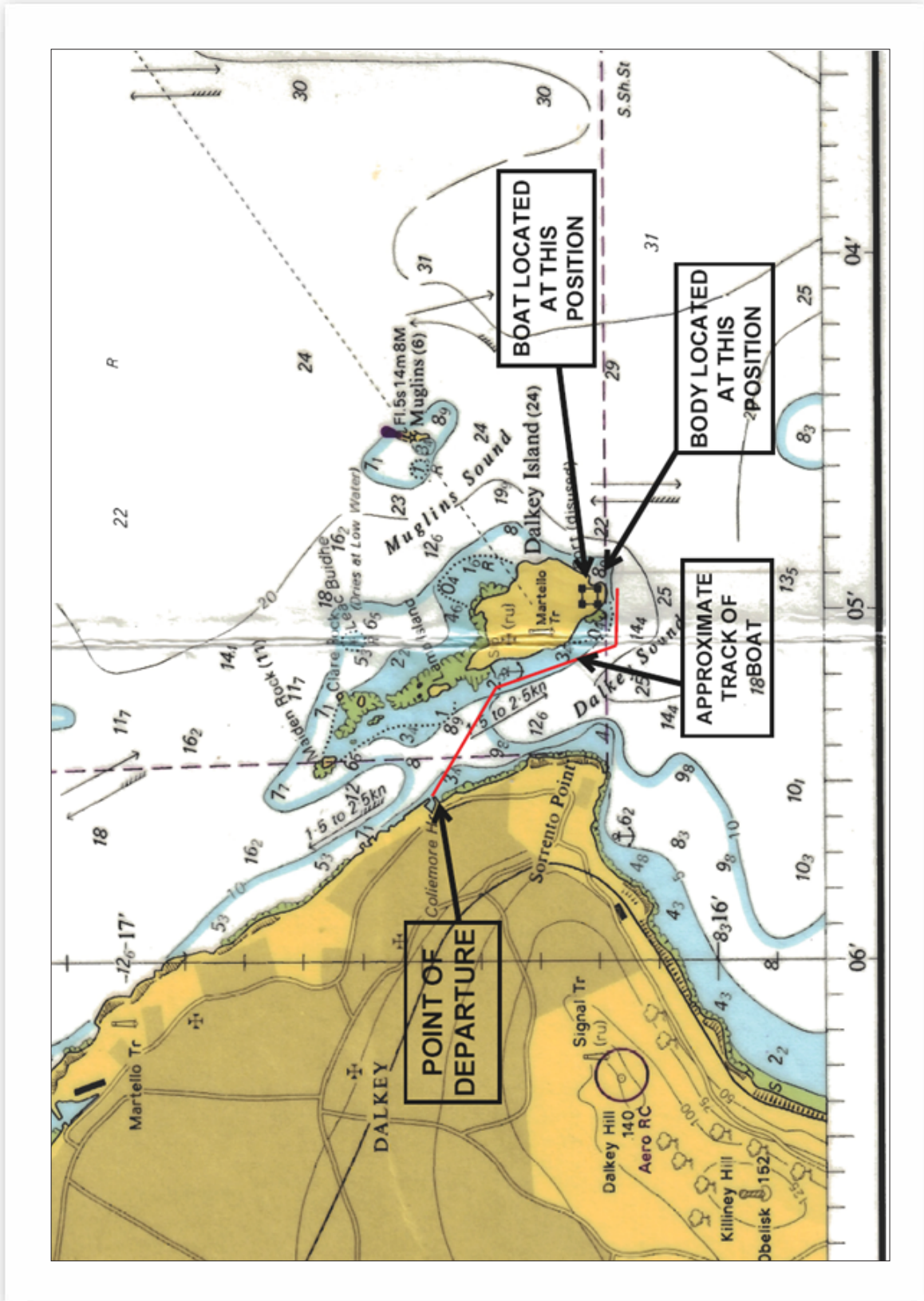
Waves: Smooth/wavelets to Slight (0.4m to 0.6m ,Significant wave height)

Temperatures: air temperatures were near 12°C

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



Appendix 9.2 Chartlet of area.



### Appendix 9.3 Photographs.



(a) Displaced after thwart.



(b) Damage to skag.



Appendix 9.3 Photographs.



(c) Dalkey sound from Coliemore Harbour.

## 10. CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

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**Note:** The address and contact details of the individual respondent has been obscured for privacy reasons.

Dear Madam,

I have read the draft report of the investigation into the casualty off Dalkey Island and have no further observations to be included in the report.

Yours Sincerely

Aisling Fennell



**MCIB RESPONSE**

The Board notes the contents of this correspondence.



16<sup>th</sup> September 2011

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

**Re: Report of Investigation into Casualty off Dalkey Island, Co. Dublin  
On 12<sup>th</sup> October 2010**

Dear Ms Reddin

I concur with recommendations 8.1 – 8.6.

Yours sincerely

Eugene Clonan  
Deputy Director  
Irish Coast Guard



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## MCIB RESPONSE

The Board notes the contents of this correspondence.