

**REPORT OF THE  
INVESTIGATION INTO  
THE CASUALTY INVOLVING  
MR. JOHN ALLEN AT BULLS  
MOUTH, CO. MAYO ON THE  
19TH MARCH 2003**

**The Marine Casualty Investigation Board was established on the 5<sup>th</sup>, June 2002 under The Merchant Shipping (Investigation of Marine Casualties) Act 2000**

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## 1. SYNOPSIS.

- 1.1 On the 19th March 2003 Mr. John Allen left his town house in Westport and boarded the Achill Island bus. He walked from the bus stop to Bulls Mouth. At about 1750 hours Mr. Allen departed from the slipway at Bulls Mouth for Inishbiggle Island. When Mr. Allen had not arrived at his house on Inishbiggle Island by 2200 hours neighbours became concerned and at 2235 hours approximately the Garda Siochana at Westport were contacted.

At 2235 hours the Gardai at Westport contacted MRCC.

Mr. John Allen remained missing until the 1st August 2003 when his body was found at Doohama, Co. Mayo.

## 2. FACTUAL INFORMATION

2.1 Mr. Allen's vessel is an open boat of timber construction. The boat is clinker built with steamed timbers (frames) and seven planks from keel to gunwale. The vessel is in reasonable condition. (See Appendix 8.1 & 8.2.)

|                 |                        |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| Length overall: | 4.24 metres            |
| Breadth:        | 1.37 metres            |
| Depth:          | 0.41 metres            |
| Thwarts:        | 2 of                   |
| Oars:           | 2 off, 2.4 metres long |
| Rowlocks:       | 2 off                  |

The engine was not located after the incident. I understand that it is an elderly single cylinder Seagull outboard engine. This type of engine has an output of about 1.6-horse power.

### 3. EVENTS PRIOR TO THE INCIDENT

- 3.1 Mr. John Allen was an experienced yachtsman.
- 3.2 Mrs. Donna Allen rarely went to their property on Inishbiggle Island. On the days that Mr. Allen would travel to the island it was a standing arrangement that Mrs. Allen would telephone the house on the island at 1900hours.
- 3.3 On the 19th March 2003 Mr. Allen left the house in Westport at 1430 hours and boarded the 1500 hours bus. Mr. Allen was carrying a two-wheel trolley, a roll of plastic and an umbrella. The bus would pass Bulls Mouth's school at about 1645 hours. Mr. Allen would alight from the bus at this point and walk the fifteen-minute journey to the slipway at Bulls Mouth, Achill Island where he kept his boat and outboard engine.

## 4. THE INCIDENT

- 4.1 On the 19th March 2003, 1950 hours, Mr. Allen was observed leaving the slipway at Bulls Mouth with the outboard engine operating (See copy of chart of area at Appendix 8.3). The weather was good (see Appendix 8.4 for the Sea Area Forecast which was issued at 1800 hours on the 19th March 2003). The Tidal conditions indicated the tide was flooding with high water at 1900 hours.
- 4.2 A short time later the engine was heard to stop. The vessel was now in front of the first house south of the slipway. The tide was coming in, from north to south direction. Mr. Allen was observed going from the stern of the boat to the bow where he began to unwind a line from a wooden frame into the water. Everything appeared normal and there was no reason for concern. At 1900 hours there was no sign of the boat, there was nothing on the bay and it was assumed that Mr. Allen had gone around the South side of the Island to his home.
- 4.3 Mrs. Allen telephoned their house on Inishbiggle Island at 18.55 hours but there was no reply. Mrs. Allen continued to try and contact her husband but without success.
- 4.4 The Gardai at Westport were contacted at 2235 hours. The Gardai contacted MRCC at 2235 hours.
- 4.4 The rescue services responded immediately and a search of the area commenced.
- 4.6 At 0213 hours on 20th March 2003 the empty, partially sunk boat, was located in position 54.03 095N 0059.36W, which is 1.25 miles Northwest of Ridge Point, Achill Island.
- 4.7 On the 21st March 2003 a small black / grey hold all and other items were found in search area. These items belonged to Mr. Allen.
- 4.8 The search continued each day until 30th March 2003 and resumed the following weekend but Mr. Allen's body was not located.

### 5. EVENTS FOLLOWING THE INCIDENT

- 5.1 Although the main search was scaled down local people continued to search for Mr. Allen.
- 5.2 On the 1st August 2003 Mr. Allen's body was recovered on Roy Beach, Doohama, Co. Mayo. The body was removed to Mayo General Hospital, Castlebar and was identified as that of Mr. John Allen, Westport, Co. Mayo.



## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

- 6.1 There can be a 6-knot current at Bulls Mouth depending on tidal conditions. A 1.6 hp engine is quite small for conditions such as this. On the day in question the engine stopped a short time after departure from the slipway. It is not known if the engine was restarted. The partially sunk boat was located about eight hours later. The engine was not located.
- 6.2 It is believed that Mr. Allen was not wearing a lifejacket.
- 6.3 One can only assume that Mr. Allen entered the water either by falling in or as a result of the boat becoming swamped.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 Lifejackets or personal floatation devices should always be worn when on open decks or on an open boat.
- 7.2 On all voyages to sea, estuaries and lakes distress signals and suitable means of communication should always be carried.
- 7.3 Where voyages are undertaken alone contact should be maintained with a person ashore either by sight or other means of communication.

**8. APPENDICES**

8.1: Photographs of vessel

8.2 Photographs of vessel

8.3 Chart of Area

8.4 Sea Area Forecast

# APPENDIX 8.1

## 8.1: Photographs of vessel



8.2 Photographs of vessel





8.4 Sea Area Forecast

Warning of heavy Atlantic swell: NIL

Text of Gale warning

NIL

| Coastal Reports       | at 6 pm   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Malin Head            | West, 2 Knots, Mist, 3 Miles, 1028, Steady                      |
| Rosslare              | South-Southwest, 4 Knots, Mist, 1.3 Miles, 1030, Falling slowly |
| Roches Pt (Automatic) | Southwest, 8 Knots, 9 Miles, 1030, Steady                       |
| Valentia              | South, 6 Knots, Cloudy, 6 Miles, 1030, Steady                   |
| Belmullet             | South, 12 Knots, Mist, 6 Miles, 1028, Falling slowly            |
| Dublin Airport        | Southeast, 5 Knots, Mist, 1.6 Miles, 1030, Falling slowly       |
| Buoy M1 53.1N, 11.2W  | South-Southwest, 16 Knots, WAVE HT 2.2 m, 1028, Steady          |
| Buoy M2 53.5N, 5.4W   | South, 5 Knots, WAVE HT 0.4 m, 1030, Steady                     |
| Buoy M3 51.2N, 10.50W | South-Southwest, 5 Knots, WAVE HT 1.9 m, 1030, Steady           |

| Sea Crossings          | State of sea for the next 48 hours |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Dublin - Holyhead      | Slight.                            |
| Rosslare - South Wales | Slight.                            |
| Cork - South Wales     | Slight.                            |
| Rosslare - France      | Slight to moderate.                |
| Cork - France          | Slight to moderate.                |

Next update before 0100 hours

A detailed forecast may be obtained by dialling *Weatherdial* on 1550 123 855.  
Calls cost € 0.73 per minute (Incl. VAT).

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06:08 FAX 353 1 6620795  
03 6:11 MET OFFICE  
353 1 6620795

MRC(A) DUBLIN

MALIN HEAD MNSC 4001  
No.9030 P. 1/1



**General Forecast Division**

Fax : (01) 8064275 Tel : (01) 8064255

**Forecast for Belmullet Bay.**

**Fax To: 07770221**

Issued at 04:56 23-Mar-2003

**Forecast for today, Sunday, 23-Mar-2003**

**Wind(Beaufort) : Southeast to east 2 or 3**  
**Weather : Fair**  
**Visibility : Good**  
**Sea State : Calm or rippled**

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RI 20:25 FAX 353 1 6620795 MR(A) DUBLIN +--+ MALIN HEAD MRSC 001  
 2003 20:26 MET 353 1 6620795 No.8803 P. 1



**General Forecast Division**

Fax : (01) 8064275 Tel : (01) 8064255

**Forecast for Blacksod Bay**

Time of Issue : 20:30, Friday, 21/Mar/2003

Fax No. : #003

Forecast for period 0900 hrs to 2400 hrs Saturday, 22-Mar-2003

|              |   |  |
|--------------|---|--|
| Wind         | : | South force 5 , later decreasing force 3 .           |
| Weather      | : | Mostly dry , ( a little mist or drizzle possible).   |
| Visibility   | : | Moderate to good.                                    |
| State of Sea | : | Southwest Sea / Swell of 3 to 4 metres ( open sea ). |

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20/03 '03 06:52 FAX 00 353 81 712962 MET SHANNON  
00 353 61 712962

001

**MET EIREANN FORECAST FOR SEARCH/RESCUE AREA**

ISSUE TIME/DATE 06:40 UTC -- 20 March 2003

LOCATION : FINNER TO ACHILL SOUND/90 MILES NW EAGLE ISO

PERIOD OF VALIDITY :0600-1000

WINDS SURFACE : BETWEEN 31010KT AND 25010KT

WINDS 1000 FT : 25010-15KT

VISIBILITY : 1500-3000M LOC 0500M AT FIRST OVERLAND OTHERWISE  
10+KM

CLOUD AMOUNTS AND HEIGHT OF BASES: SCT500FT BKN1000FT LOC BKN  
200FT AT FIRST OVERLAND, OTHERWISE SCT1500FT BKN3000FT

WEATHER: MIST/DRIZZLE AT FIRST E CONNACHT/DONEGAL WITH FOG  
ON HILLS

FREEZING LEVEL :6000FT

MSL PRESSURE :1027-1030HPA

AIR TEMP. :6-10 C

SEA TEMP. :9/10 C

STATE OF SEA :SLIGHT IN ACHILL SOUND  
MODERATE (2M) SWELL 90 MILES NW EAGLE ISLAND

STATE OF GROUND :

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION :

Issued By : at 06:48 UTC on 20 March 2003

MET Eireann, Aviation Services Division, Shannon  
Telephone No. 061-471439 Telefax No. 061-472737



19/03 '03 WED 23:02 FAX 00 353 61 712964 MEJA SHANNON +++ RALIN COASTGUARD @UUL  
00 353 61 712964

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**MET EIREANN FORECAST FOR SEARCH/RESCUE AREA**

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ISSUE TIME/DATE 23:21 UTC -- 19 March 2003

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LOCATION :SHANNON TO ACHILL

---

PERIOD OF VALIDITY :19/2300 TO 20/0300

---

WINDS SURFACE : 19010KT BECMG 25010KT

---

WINDS 1000 FT : 24010-15KT

---

VISIBILITY : 3000M-8KM OCNL 1500M

---

CLOUD AMOUNTS AND HEIGHT OF BASES: FEW1000FT BKN 4000FT OCNL  
SCT500FT BKN1000FT

---

WEATHER: MIST OCNL DRIZZLE

---

FREEZING LEVEL :6000FT

---

MSL PRESSURE :CIRCA 1030HPA

---

AIR TEMP. :6-9 C

---

SEA TEMP. :10 C

---

STATE OF SEA :SLIGHT TO MODERATE

---

STATE OF GROUND :

---

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION :

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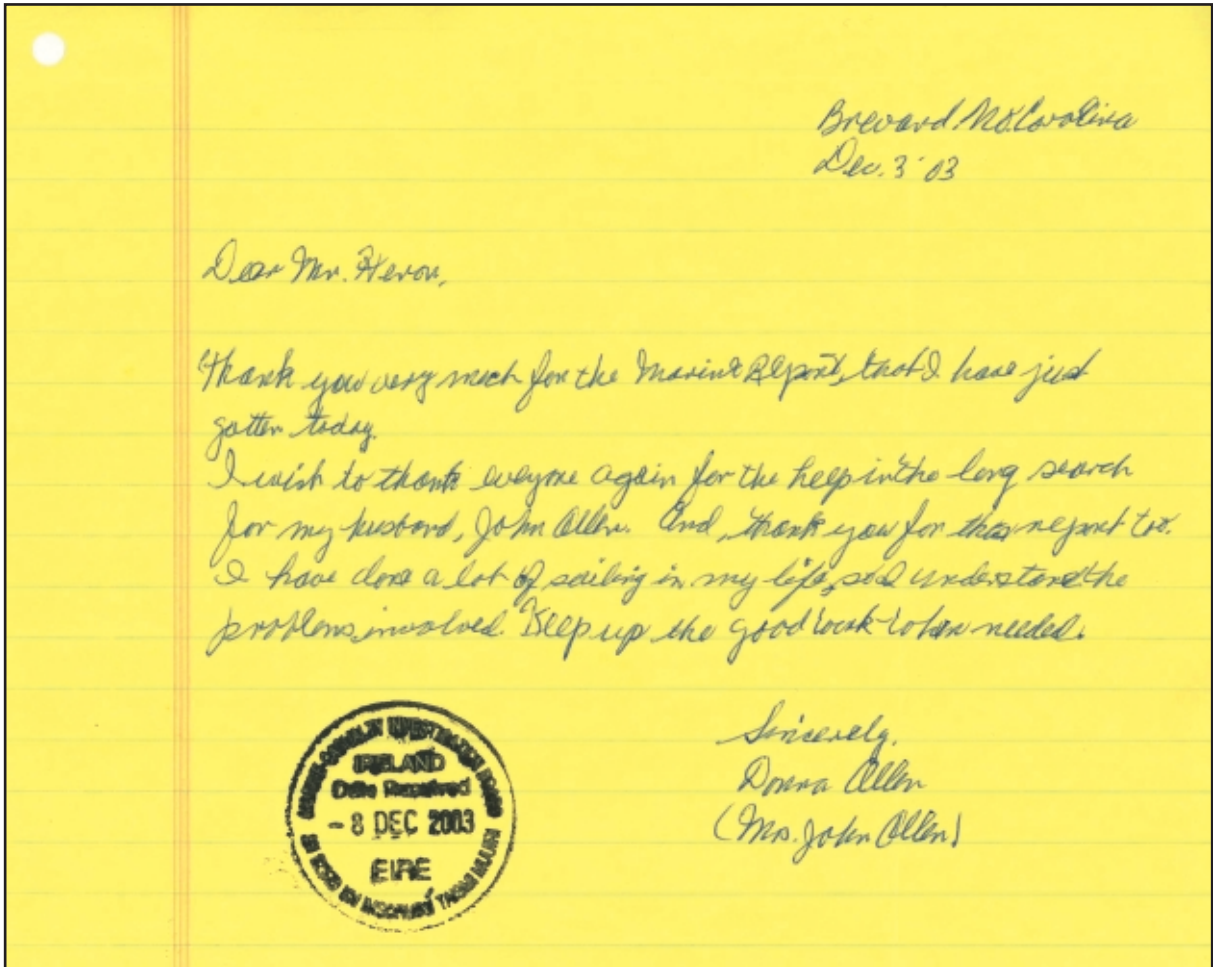
Issued By : at 23:26 UTC on 19 March 2003



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Mrs. Donna Allen



MCIB Response

**MCIB RESPONSE TO THE LETTER FROM MRS. DONNA ALLEN  
OF 3RD DECEMBER 2003.**

The MCIB notes the contents of this letter.

Mr. Thomas Calvey



Thomas J. Calvey  
 Bullsmouth RD  
 Dooniver  
 Achill

Co Mayo  
 8-12-2003

I Thomas Calvey would like to state that I have no comments or observations to offer on the draft report of the investigation in to the casualty involving MR John ALLEN at the Bullsmouth, Co MAYO on the 19th MARCH, 2003.

Thomas J. Calvey.

MCIB Response

**MCIB RESPONSE TO THE LETTER FROM MR. THOMAS CALVEY  
OF 8TH DECEMBER 2003.**

The MCIB notes the contents of this letter.



Irish Coast Guard



**Mr Dick Heron**  
Secretary  
Marine Casualty Investigation Board  
Department of Communications,  
Marine & Natural Resources  
Leeson Lane  
Dublin 2.

28<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2003.

Re MCIB 77 Draft Report on drowning at Bull's Mouth 19<sup>th</sup> March 03.

Dear Mr Heron,

The Irish Coast Guard has no comment or observation to make concerning this report.

Yours sincerely,

**Eamon Torpav**  
SAR Operations Manager  
IRCH HQ.

MCIB Response

**MCIB RESPONSE TO THE LETTER FROM IRISH COAST GUARD  
OF 28TH NOVEMBER 2003.**

The MCIB notes the contents of this letter.



