

**REPORT INTO
THE LOUGH BELTRA TRAGEDY
WITH RESULTANT
LOSS OF LIFE**

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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1. SYNOPSIS

- 1.1 On Sunday the 6th of August 2006 Mr Alan Joyce, while enjoying an afternoon of fun and adventure with some friends on "Lough Beltra" Co. Mayo tragically lost his life in a Jet Ski incident (See Appendix 8.1 for Aerial photograph of the location).

2. FACTUAL INFORMATION

2.1 Technical Description of the Jet ski

General Specification

Model	JF650-B5
Hull Number	JF650B-606198
Engine Number	JF650AE156736
Colour	White
Model Year	1993
Assembly Date	1/4/93
Licence Plate Number	AA5016
Date of Sale	24/8/96
Warranty End Date	23/8/97
Make	Kawasaki

Technical and Construction Specification

1. 635cc 2-stroke, 2 cylinder, crankcase reed valve, water cooled.
2. The JF650-B5 was not eligible for any safety recalls or service campaigns.
3. Date of Sale 24/08/1996
4. With reference to the seating capacity, it seated 2 persons.
5. SMC (Sheet Moulding Compound), fibreglass sheet and resin pressed into a mould.
6. USCG Approval NO. 162.02/11.

Technical history detail from purchase

Craft of this type were brought into the EU by Kawasaki Motors Europe and then distributed throughout the UK and Ireland by Kawasaki Motors (UK) Ltd (See Appendices 8.2 and 8.3).

The JF650-B5 was not eligible for any safety recalls or service campaigns.

The craft was purchased on Tuesday 1st of August 2006 by Mr. Thomas McLoughlin of Beltra, Glenhest, Castlebar, County Mayo.

The craft was tested on Wednesday the 2nd of August in Lough Beltra when it developed a mechanical problem with the pump drive shear pin, which was repaired by a local agent on the same date.

Mr. Arnold Weiner repaired the damage to the coupling drive (See Appendix 8.4). Mr. Thomas McLoughlin and Mr. Aiden Fenton subsequently ran the jet ski at Lough Beltra. The pump drive tested satisfactorily.

The craft was returned to Lough Beltra on the 6th of August 2006 and ran for 3 hours approximately prior to the incident. The dead man switch was functioning at this time.

Hull and Buoyancy

The crafts external shell construction material consisted of a process known as SMC (Sheet Moulding Compound), fibreglass sheet and resin which is then pressed into a mould (See Appendices 8.5 and 8.6).

On inspection of the crafts stern and main section, no indentation or structural damage was noted. The hull was in an intact state, with slight gel coat abrasion damage, which would not affect the stability or buoyancy of the craft.

The compartments of the hull, not used for storage, engine or pump components, have either expandable foam or polystyrene incorporated to aid buoyancy. All securing straps were in place at the time of inspection (See Appendix 8.7).

The Forward compartment contained the fuel tank, which was half full at the time of inspection.

Operation and Control

A Functional test was carried out on the following systems:

1. Steering System
(Minimal play due to excessive wear on the connecting pinions)
2. Engine power management i.e. throttle cable connection from trigger to engine control.
3. Dead man Switch was not fitted to the craft at the time of inspection.

Note: Engine running, Dead man Switch and battery were not tested due to the crafts immersion in water.

Upper Hull

Damage to the port side upper hull in way of the steering consul. This damage may have been caused during the recovery operation (See Appendix 8.8).

Manufacturers Warning Signage

Note: Operational Warning No. 12, which states that:

“Releasing the throttle completely reduces the ability to steer, you need thrust to steer” (See Appendix 8.9).

2.2	Name of Deceased: Address: D.O.B.	Mr. Alan Joyce. Castlebar, Co. Mayo. 21st April 1987.
2.3	Survivor:	Mr. Conor Deffley. Castlebar, Co. Mayo.
2.4	Owner of Jet ski: Address:	Mr. Thomas McLoughlin Glenhest, Co. Mayo.
2.5	Rescuers:	Mr. John and Mr. Aidan Fenton, Glenhest, Co. Mayo

EVENTS PRIOR TO THE INCIDENT

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- 3.1 In the early afternoon of the 6th of August 2006 a group of young men met in Castlebar town where they arranged to go to Lough Beltra to try out two recently purchased jet skis.
- 3.2 The jet skis had been purchased in Granard on the 1st of August by Mr. Aidan Fenton and Mr. Thomas McLoughlin.
- 3.3 On 2nd of August, 2006 both jet skis were transported by Mr. Fenton's pickup truck to Lough Beltra where they were tested on the water. Mr. Fenton's jet ski performed well but that of Mr. McLoughlin developed mechanical problems.
- 3.4 The jet ski was examined and repaired by Mr. Arnold Menier, a local mechanic who identified the problem as being the pump drive shear pin, which was later replaced.
- 3.5 On Sunday, the 6th August 2006, a group of 12 friends gathered at the lake side, some of whom took turns on the jet ski's. A "Safe" area on the North side of the Lough opposite Fenton's house was identified. This was an area of relatively shallow water (See hatched area at Appendix 8.1).
- 3.6 That afternoon a total of five lifejackets were available for use.

4. THE INCIDENT

- 4.1 The afternoon was relatively uneventful until approximately 16:30 hours, when Mr. Fenton's jet ski began to give trouble and was brought ashore for repair. Mr. McLoughlin also decided to return to shore at about this time. Upon his return Mr. McLoughlin allowed Mr. Conor Deffley and Mr. Alan Joyce to borrow his jet ski.
- 4.2 It is important to note that neither men wore a lifejacket although they were available, indeed statements suggest that they had been advised to wear lifejackets but choose to ignore this. It is also noteworthy to point out that neither men would be classed as "swimmers".
- 4.3 At 17:00 hours approximately, witnesses observed the jet ski heading outside the "safe" zone, (a line drawn from the boat harbour on the North West side of the Lough to an orange marker on the North East side of the lough), i.e. an area of relatively shallow water. Mr. Conor Deffley was driving the Jet ski with Mr. Alan Joyce as a passenger.
- 4.4 After approximately ten minutes they decided to head back to shore. According to Mr. Deffley, he executed a turn to his right at slow speed. It is accepted that this lack of speed led to the craft losing momentum and caused it to keel over. The result of this action is that the two occupants ended up in the water. Numerous attempts were made to upright and start the jet ski but to no avail. Mr. Alan Joyce was now approximately 10 feet from the jet ski and in difficulty. Mr. Deffley made several attempts to rescue his friend but his attempts were in vain. Mr. Joyce drowned at the scene.

5. EVENTS FOLLOWING THE INCIDENT

- 5.1 It is understood that the "DeadMan" mechanism activated as designed. This is a device connected to the driver's wrist band via a cord, and to a spring loaded engine cut out designed to trip the engine if the occupant pulls on it or is thrown from the craft. This safety feature prevents the craft from continuing to manoeuvre, thus preventing potential injury due to impact with the craft. It also brings the craft to a stop providing an opportunity for the driver to re-engage the dead man mechanism allowing restart of the engine in the normal manner.
- 5.2 Within minutes of the jet ski keeling over those present on the shore realised that something was wrong. The two young men had failed to restart the jet ski, they were very poor swimmers, were not wearing lifejackets and in deep water. It was later discovered that neither of the two young men understood the function of the dead-man mechanism and were therefore unable to restart the craft. A rescue operation was put into action with the brothers John and Aidan Fenton bravely putting their own lives at risk by swimming out to the victims to render assistance. The emergency services were called and responded rapidly under the supervision of the Irish Coast Guard and local Gardai.
- 5.3 Mr. Conor Deffley made two attempts to rescue Mr. Joyce. Each time he was grabbed by Mr. Joyce and was forced to break free, fearing for his own life, as he was being dragged under. The first to arrive at the scene was Mr. Aiden Fenton, he describes a very sad and distressing situation. Mr. Alan Joyce was nowhere to be seen and presumed drowned. Mr. Conor Deffley, in a panic stricken state, was himself in danger of drowning and was now feeling the effects of exhaustion. Minutes later they were joined by Mr. Fenton's brother John who's assessment of the situation was that Mr. Joyce had succumbed to the lake and Mr. Conor Deffley, in an exhausted and panic stricken state had to be supported by Mr. Aiden Fenton. The immediate priority was now to get all three back to shore. This they achieved by holding onto the upturned jet ski and kicking for shore.
- 5.4 Emergency services were now arriving, a boat was launched, the SAR Helicopter was tasked from Sligo, and additional Coast Guard units were arriving to carry out surface searches. The Gardai suspended the search due to darkness and it was resumed the following morning. The body of Mr. Joyce was recovered by divers in 10 metres of water close to where the jet ski keeled over.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Mr. Alan Joyce and Mr. Conor Deffley ventured out on a jet ski for what should have been nothing more than an exciting thrill. Tragically, Mr. Joyce lost his young life and Mr. Deffley is very fortunate to be alive today thanks to the bravery of two young men, Aiden Fenton and John Fenton.
- 6.2 Mr. Joyce and Mr. Deffley were poorly prepared for this adventure in so far as;
- a) They had little or no familiarisation training of jet skis.
 - b) They were considered to be very poor swimmers.
 - c) They choose to ignore advice and failed to wear lifejackets.
 - d) They ventured out of shallow water into deep water.
- A culmination of the above factors finally led to this tragedy.
- 6.3 The investigation concludes that neither mechanical failure nor environmental or weather conditions was a contributing factor in this tragedy.
- 6.4 This casualty investigation, like all others, unearths a chain of events leading up to a tragedy and by understanding the development of those links, hopes to build a picture of what happened based on the facts.
- 6.5 The investigation highlights the fact that the two young men were not familiar with the operation of jet skies. This is evident in so far as the men were unaware that the craft must maintain a certain speed in order to create momentum and thus remain upright during manoeuvres. (Refer Fig 8. Operational warning # 12).
- 6.6 The functions of the "Dead Man" mechanism was not understood by either of the two young men and therefore they were unable to restart the engine.
- 6.7 The two men who were regarded as poor or very poor swimmers chose not to wear lifejackets contrary to advice and current legislation.
- 6.8 They left a safe area of shallow water and entered an area of deep water.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 Due to the escalating incidence of jet ski accidents it is recommended that the Department of Transport explore the feasibility of mandatory training. This should be developed with the Marine Survey Office and provided by properly authorised bodies that would be subject to regular auditing. The course should provide practical training in all aspects of handling jet skis, a clear understanding of the operational controls of the jet ski and a limited knowledge of maintenance of the craft. The course should also incorporate instruction on the following aspects of legislation:

Collision regulations.

Solas Chapter V.

Personal floatation devices and operational safety. Regulations 2005

Recreational Craft Directive 94/25EC and amendment 44/2003

Investigation of Marine Casualties Act. 2000

Harbours Act 1946, 1996.

Fisheries Harbour Act 1980

Maritime Safety Act 2005.

- 7.2 The MCIB recommends that all jet ski's be registered and that any person wishing to operate a jet ski must be licensed and have completed a recognised training course and produce a certificate from such course.
- 7.3 A further recommendation is that all such craft should be regularly serviced and carry a minimum of life saving equipment as outlined in the "Code of practice for the safe operation of Recreational Craft".
- 7.4 Under the provisions of the Maritime Safety Act of 2005, local authorities, Harbours authorities and fishery harbours have been granted clear powers to make bye-laws to regulate and control the use of jet ski's and other fast powered recreational craft. This is granted with the intention of protecting other water users, property, wildlife and areas of historical significance.

It should also be noted that local authorities, Harbour authorities, and An Garda Síochána have considerable powers in regulating and enforcing the provisions of this Act.

8. LIST OF APPENDICES

- 8.1. Aerial Photograph of the incident area.
- 8.2. Photograph of engine compartment.
- 8.3. Photograph of after end engine compartment.
- 8.4. Photograph of the pump drive coupling.
- 8.5. Photograph of the hull section.
- 8.6. Photograph of the stern section of the craft.
- 8.7. Photograph of the forward compartment.
- 8.8. Photograph showing the damage caused in portside upper side.
- 8.9. Photograph of the crafts safe operation signage.

APPENDIX 8.1

Appendix 8.1 Aerial Photograph of the incident area.

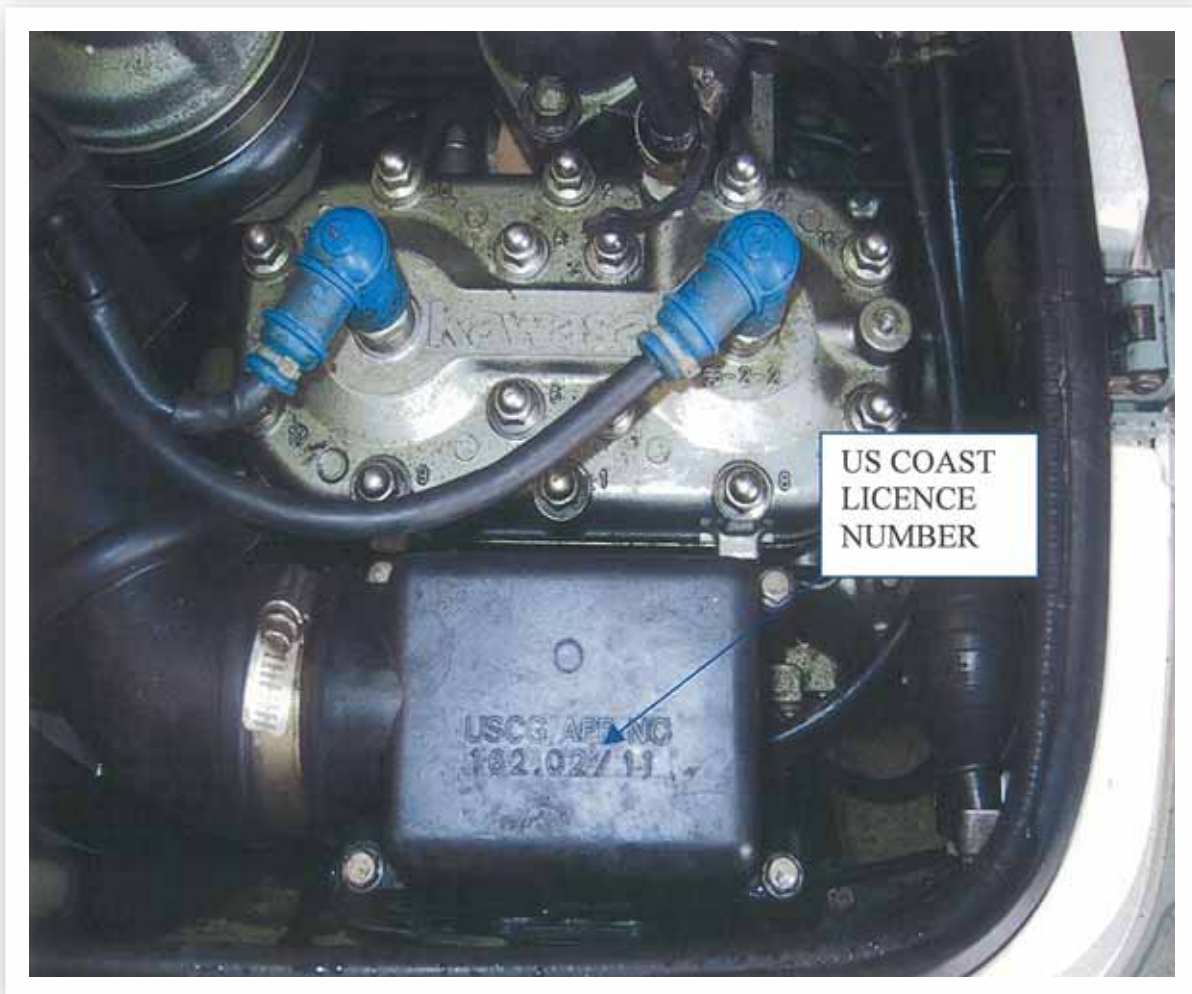


Appendix 8.2 Photograph of engine compartment.

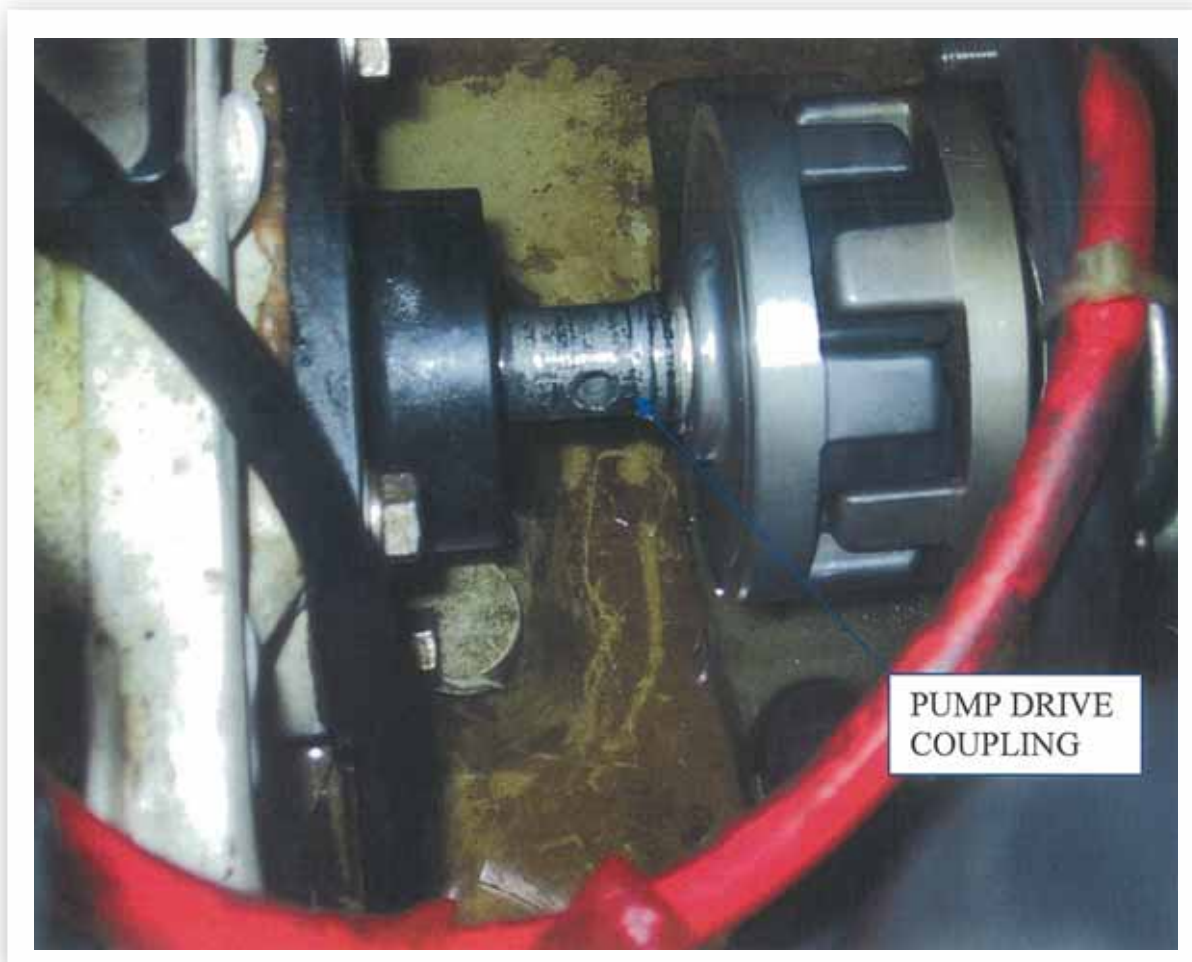


APPENDIX 8.3

Appendix 8.3 Photograph of after end engine compartment.



Appendix 8.4 Photograph of the pump drive coupling.



Appendix 8.5 Photograph of the hull section.

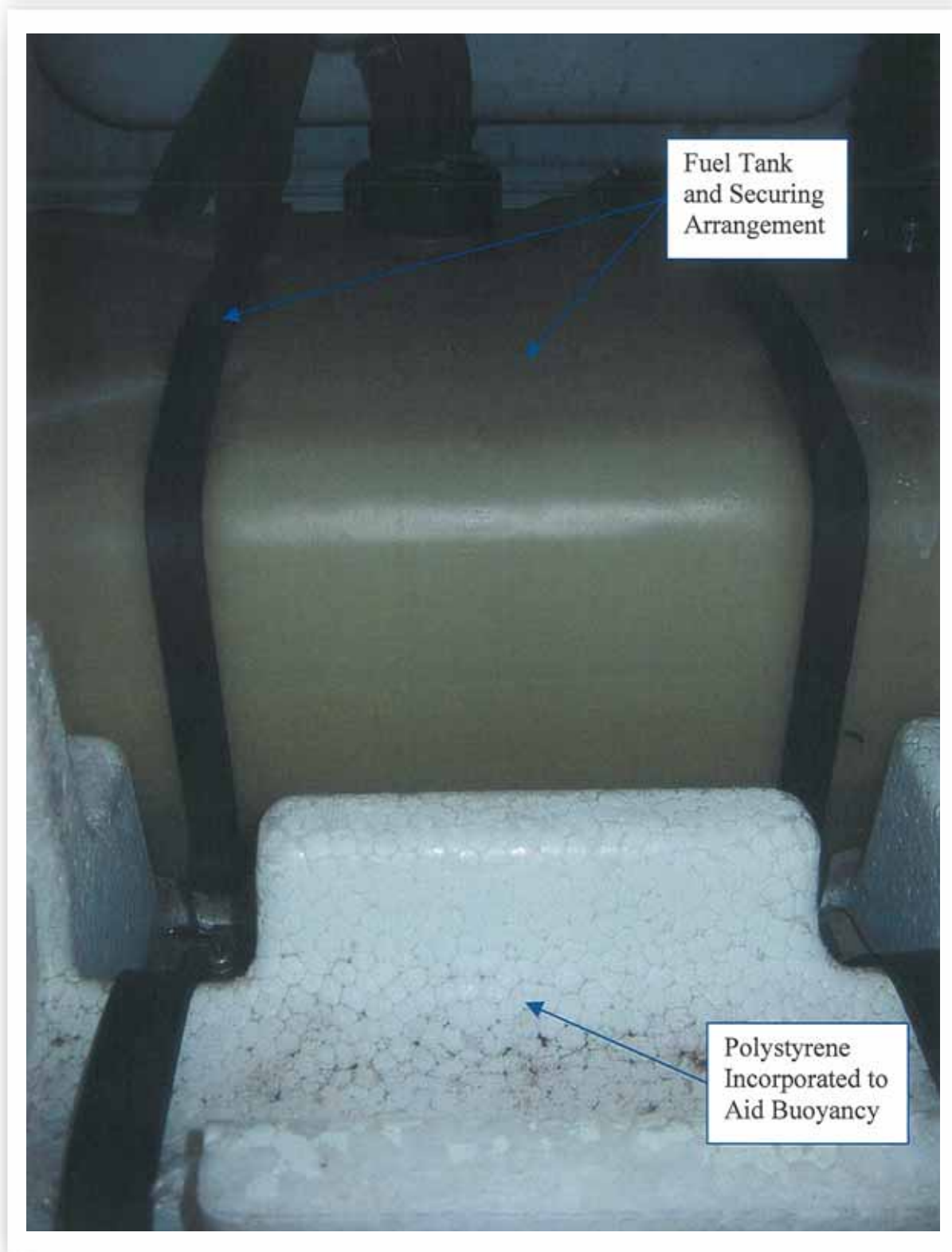


Appendix 8.6 Photograph of the stern section of the craft.



APPENDIX 8.7

Appendix 8.7 Photograph of the forward compartment.



Appendix 8.8 Photograph showing the damage caused in portside upper side.



Appendix 8.9 Photograph of the crafts safe operation signage



9.

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9. CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

A. WIJNEN-DE KONING
BLACKROCK HOUSE
ENISLAND
CASTELBAR COUNTY MAYO
IERLAND
TEL / FAX 094-24042



MCIB
Leeson Lane
Dublin 2

Glenisland, 09 – 02 – 2007

Your Ref.no. MCIB/128

Dear MR/Mrs,

In Your Draft Report Factual Information. Pag. 3


Mr. Arnold Weiner Repaired the damage to the coupling drive, ect.

But I make a nut for a pouully, I don't know where it belong for,
and I see only that part.

I told that also the Garda inspectors. Its also in there report.

I like that changed into the report.

Yours faithfully,


Arnold Wijnen

MCIB RESPONSE The MCIB notes the contents of this letter.

9. CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED



MCIB RESPONSE to letter from An Garda Síochána dated 6th March 2007.

The MCIB notes the contents of this letter.

