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**REPORT OF THE
INVESTIGATION INTO THE
DEATH OF
MR. TOMÁS MANNION
ON LOUGH DERG,
ON 13th FEBRUARY 2008**

REPORT No. MCIB/156

Report MCIB/156 published by The Marine Casualty Investigation Board
Published 24th March 2009.

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1. SYNOPSIS

Mr. Tomás Mannion arrived at Bealkelly Woods on the 12th February 2008 and it is presumed that on the 13th February 2008 he borrowed a canoe and went out on the lake. He was reported missing on the 23rd February 2008 and after a brief search his body was recovered in shallow water close to where he is presumed to have departed originally in the canoe.

2. EVENTS PRIOR TO THE INCIDENT

- 2.1 Mr. Mannion arrived at the privately owned Bealkelly Wood on the 12th February 2008. He obtained permission from the owner of the wood, Mr. Del Harding, to camp on his property and having been shown a campsite began working with Mr. Harding trimming branches and cutting timber. Mr. Harding observed that Mr. Mannion was in good form and very fit.
- 2.2 The following day Mr. Harding was away from Bealkelly Wood and did not see Mr. Mannion. When Mr. Mannion did not appear on subsequent days he presumed he had found the weather too severe for camping and had returned to Ennis. (Appendix 7.1 Weather Report refers).
- 2.3 A high pressure system was stable over Ireland at this time and the wind was Easterly. The fetch from Dromineer with wind direction is about 9 miles and can give rise to a short choppy sea between Holy Island and another small island closer to the Scarriff side of the lake.

3. THE INCIDENT

- 3.1 On 22nd February 2008 Mr. Mannion's friend called at Bealkelly enquiring after Tomás. He informed Mr. Harding that he had been unable to contact him on his mobile 'phone and that he had not been seen in any of his usual locations. Later that evening Mr. Harding met Mr. Mannion's sister who with a group of friends then returned to Bealkelly Wood to search for her brother. His tent was located and his belongings were found in the tent.
- 3.2 It was not possible to search the wood properly during the night but at first light after the Gardáí were notified, the search was resumed. During the course of the search of the wood Mr. Harding noticed a kayak was missing from its usual location. A spade type single blade paddle was also missing. Mr. Del Harding immediately directed the Gardáí to the most likely location for the canoe to wash up on the shore.
- 3.3 The Killaloe Coast Guard were alerted at 12.28 hrs. At 13.46 hrs. Coastguard helicopter R115 tasked to the search located Mr. Mannion's body and the canoe. The body was recovered by the Killaloe Coast Guard Unit.

4. EVENTS FOLLOWING THE INCIDENT

- 4.1 Mr. Mannion's body was recovered fully clothed wearing a small backpack and a 50N zip front waistcoat type PFD. The backpack contained a fleece jacket and other clothing and packaging from a meal.
- 4.2 The canoe sank while attempts were made to salvage it. Attempts to locate the canoe subsequently failed. The water is stained with peat in the location where the canoe sank in a depth of 10 feet. The paddle was not located.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 Mr. Mannion had borrowed the kayak canoe without permission so was unaware the canoe leaked. The canoe was not in good condition and had not been used for two years. Mr. Mannion had probably reached Holy Island or the neighbouring island as he had appeared to have consumed a small meal and had packed the detritus and wrappings in the backpack.
- 5.2 The canoe probably broached and capsized on the return journey to the mainland. The paddle chosen by Mr. Mannion was not a kayak paddle but a single bladed spade paddle suitable for a Canadian river canoe. The single blade paddle is designed for use from the aft position or in tandem with another canoeist. It cannot retrieve a kayak canoe once it has broached and due to the lack of steering from the mid ships position with such a paddle it may have contributed to the canoe broaching. A single blade paddle does not have the balance properties of a kayak paddle.
- 5.3 It is likely that Mr. Mannion was unable to right the canoe due to the backpack he was wearing. The backpack may also have contributed to the capsize as it caused his centre of gravity to be higher on the canoe which is an inherently unstable craft in its normal operating condition. The backpack should have been placed in the canoe (sea going kayaks may carry small packs on the top canopy of the craft) but due to the leak in the hull Mr. Mannion probably carried it on his back to keep the contents as dry as possible.
- 5.4 The autopsy carried out at Limerick Regional Hospital revealed Mr. Mannion had drowned. This may have occurred as the backpack became waterlogged and overcame the limited buoyancy of the 50 newton PFD or Mr. Mannion lost consciousness due to hypothermia and subsequently drowned.
- 5.5 The last communication between Mr. Mannion's mobile 'phone and the nearest mast at Scarriff occurred at 14.40 hrs. on 13th February 2008. The Gardáí were not alerted until 11.20 hrs. on 23rd February 2008. The Killaloe Coast Guard were not tasked to the search until 12.28 hrs.
- 5.6 While in this case it would not have been significant, in practice the Gardáí and Irish Coast Guard should be notified immediately there is concern for a missing person whether on the water or in rugged country. The Irish Coast Guard is well equipped to carry out night searches both on land and on the water.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 Any one setting out on the water should always notify a responsible person of their proposed route and return time. They should also ensure they are familiar and proficient in the operation and limitations of the craft being used and its equipment.
- 6.2 All participants in an adventure activity such as canoeing should undertake basic training in rescue and survival techniques in respect of their chosen activity. Information on basic training courses and proficiency courses for canoeists can be obtained from the Irish Canoe Union.
- 6.3 A full risk assessment should be carried out prior to all river, lake and open sea canoe/kayak trips. Fundamental to any such risk, assessment should be the ability of the individual to cope with the worst conditions likely to be experienced. Users of PFDs should make themselves fully aware of the limitations of these devices. These or similar recommendations have been made in a number of other incidents involving canoeists.
- 6.4 Recreational craft users should comply with the Department of Transport Code of Practise for Safe Operation of Recreational Craft.

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7.1 Weather Report for the Scariff Bay area of Lough Derg, Co. Clare
for the period 12th to 23rd February 2008.

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Appendix 7.1 Weather Report for the Scarriff Bay area of Lough Derg, Co. Clare for the period 12th to 23rd February 2008.

Weather report
for the Scarriff Bay area of Lough Derg, County Clare
for the period of the 12th to the 23rd of February 2008.

Stations

Two synoptic stations were used to produce this weather report for the period of the 12th to the 23rd of February 2008; Birr and Shannon airport. The minimum air temperature as well as the maximum wind speed (10 minute mean wind speed) and it's associated direction for each station are displayed in the tables below. The period has been divided into three sets of four days for simplicity.

Period from the 12th to the 15th of February 2008

General Meteorological Situation: A high pressure over Scandinavia maintains a light to moderate mostly southeasterly airflow over the country.

Birr

Date	Minimum Temperature	Maximum wind speed (Direction)
12/02/2008	1.6 ° Celsius	10 knots (140° southeasterly)
13/02/2008	-0.9 ° Celsius	5 knots (50° northeasterly)
14/02/2008	-1.3 ° Celsius	8 knots (110° southeasterly)
15/02/2008	-4.7 ° Celsius	4 knots (120° southeasterly)

Shannon Airport

Date	Minimum Temperature	Maximum wind speed (Direction)
12/02/2008	1.7° Celsius	10 knots (110° southeasterly)
13/02/2008	0.5° Celsius	7 knots (100° southeasterly)
14/02/2008	-1.4° Celsius	13 knots (100° southeasterly)
15/02/2008	1.2° Celsius	9 knots (90° easterly)

Appendix 7.1 Weather Report for the Scariff Bay area of Lough Derg, Co. Clare for the period 12th to 23rd February 2008.

Period from the 16th to the 19th of February 2008

General Meteorological Situation: A slack and stable mostly southeasterly airflow covers the country.

Birr

Date	Minimum Temperature	Maximum wind speed (Direction)
16/02/2008	-1.6° Celsius	7 knots (130° southeasterly)
17/02/2008	-4.8° Celsius	6 knots (50° northeasterly)
18/02/2008	-6.2° Celsius	4 knots (160° southeasterly)
19/02/2008	-3.9° Celsius	9 knots (150° southeasterly)

Shannon Airport

Date	Minimum Temperature	Maximum wind speed (Direction)
16/02/2008	4.3° Celsius	11 knots (110° southeasterly)
17/02/2008	-1.2° Celsius	9 knots (90° easterly)
18/02/2008	-3.6° Celsius	10 knots (110° southeasterly)
19/02/2008	0.6° Celsius	11 knots (100° southeasterly)

Appendix 7.1 Weather Report for the Scariff Bay area of Lough Derg, Co. Clare for the period 12th to 23rd February 2008.

Period from the 20th to the 23rd of February 2008

General Meteorological Situation: A strong and gusty mostly southwesterly airflow covers the country.

Birr

Date	Minimum Temperature	Maximum wind speed (Direction)
20/02/2008	2.7° Celsius	8 knots (210° southwesterly)
21/02/2008	5.8° Celsius	18 knots (240° southwesterly)
22/02/2008	6.6° Celsius	18 knots (270° westerly)
23/02/2008	6.2° Celsius	15 knots (210° southwesterly)

Shannon Airport

Date	Minimum Temperature	Maximum wind speed (Direction)
20/02/2008	3.4° Celsius	12 knots (220° southwesterly)
21/02/2008	7.8° Celsius	24 knots (230° southwesterly)
22/02/2008	6.2° Celsius	29 knots (230° southwesterly)
23/02/2008	6.4° Celsius	19 knots (220° southwesterly)

Summary

Lowest temperature recorded between the 12th and the 23rd of February 2008:

8. LIST OF CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

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Ms Bridie Cullinane, Secretary
Marine Casualty Investigation Board
Leeson Lane
Dublin 2

December 4th 2008

**Draft Report into the death of Mr Tomás Mannion, Lough Derg,
February 13th 2008.**

Dear Bridie,

I acknowledge receipt of the draft report dated November 21st.

Other family members and I have read the draft report and agree with its accuracy.

We have no particular observations or amendments to offer and recommend that the report be adopted as final.

We attended the Inquest yesterday afternoon where the verdict was recorded as Accidental Death by Drowning. And it struck February 13th as the date of death.

We would just ask that you change his name on the report from Thomas to his true Christian name "Tomás".

Yours truly on behalf of the family,

Leo Mannion
Knockanean
Ennis
Co Clare

Tel: 086-8211010



MCIB RESPONSE

The MCIB notes the contents of this letter.

An Garda Síochána

An Garda Síochána,
Cill da Lua
An Clar
Eire

Tel/Fón: 061-620540
Fax- 061-620543



An Garda Síochána,
Killaloe
Co. Clare
Ireland

Website: www.garda.ie

MCIB/156

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GARDA SÍOCHÁNA
PUBLIC OFFICE

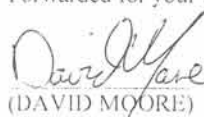
02 DEC 2008

KILLALOE
DIVISION OF CLARE

RE: Draft report of the investigation into the death of Mr. Tomas Mannion in Lough Derg, on or about 13th February 2008.

I have read the draft report in relation to the above. I believe that all events have been covered and the information in the report concurs with my investigation. I have nothing further to add to your report. I do firmly agree with your recommendations.

Forwarded for your information, please


GARDA 33096E
(DAVID MOORE)



MCIB RESPONSE

The MCIB notes the contents of this letter.

F. A. O.
Bridie Cullinane

Your Ref.
MCIB/156.

Re: Investigation into the death of Mr. Thomas
Mannion in Lough Beg about 03rd Feb. 2008.

I have no comments or observations
to offer in relation to this report.

Forwarded for your information, please.

Denis Swift
DENIS SWIFT



MCIB RESPONSE

The MCIB notes the contents of this letter.



Del Harding
Beakelly Wood,
Tuamgraney,
Co Clare

Tel 061 ~~640037~~
973041

Your Ref: MCIB/156

26th Nov 2008

Dear Madam,

I have today received your letter dated 21.11.08 and the Draft Report into the death of Tomás Mannion.

The report is accurate in so far as the main facts pertaining to the tragedy. There are, however, 2 minor errors, possibly merely typing errors that I think, in the interests of total accuracy, should be remedied in the final report.

One is merely the misspelling of the location; it should be *Beakelly* wood, rather than *Ballykelly*. The other is that on page 6 it is stated the canoes 'sank in a depth of 10 metres'. This is not so, as I know the lake intimately and originally directed the Rescue Services to the spot where the body was located. It is approximately 10 *feet* deep there, not 10 metres. This also contradicts the comment on page 3 that 'the body was located in shallow water'.

It is however true that the water was peat-stained and of limited visibility. Even in optimum conditions, in summertime, flat calm and overhead sun, it is seldom possible to see down deeper than about 6 feet at most.

In addition I would like to add a couple of comments and pose a question.

Page 4 (2.3) refers to a 'short choppy sea' commonly arising in the lake in this area with the wind in the East. While this is true in itself, the water/wind conditions would not necessarily have to be this strong to pose serious danger to such a tiny craft as the kayak in question (12 foot in length, beam approx 16" and a freeboard of about 4 or 5 inches).

Even a small wave of only a foot or so high would cause grave danger to such a small craft and almost certainly overturn it if broached. The principal reason the kayak was laid up and out of use was its unsuitability for use on Lough Derg. The leak, which was only a seepage from an old repair, was, in my opinion, insignificant.

Also it would appear, as the report states Mr Mannion reached one of the islands safely and the accident happened on the return journey (he was seen by a passing fisherman halfway across). On the outward journey he would have been travelling *into* the wind, the safest position for any boat in any sea conditions, but on the return journey would have the wind and wave behind him. This is an extremely tricky set of circumstances, potentially very dangerous, and requires a considerable degree of

seamanship to safely control the boat. The speed of the boat must be maintained at a critical ratio to the speed of the wind/wave in order to maintain steerage way. A failure to maintain this critical speed leads to inevitable broaching and, in a small craft, capsize.

On page 7 (5.5) reference is made to the last phone call made on Mr Mannion's mobile phone at 14.40 hours, 13.2.08. The question arises as to whether the number to which this call was made was recorded, whether the call was answered, by whom and whether the call indicated the location of Mr Mannion at the time (ie was he on an island, on the outward or return journey) – or was it a call for help?

I am,

Yours faithfully

Del Harding



MCIB RESPONSE

The MCIB notes the contents of this letter.

