

**New South Wales Police**

**STATEMENT in the matter of:**  
Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race Investigation

**Place:**  
Tasmania Police Search & Rescue  
Hobart

**Date:** 25 October 1999

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**Name:** Damian Anthony BIDGOOD

**Address:** Police Search and Rescue Hobart

**Tel. No.:** 03 62302454

**Occupation:** Police Officer

**STATES:-**

1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence which I would be prepared, if necessary, to give in court as a witness. The statement is a true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable for prosecution if I wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.
2. I am 36 years of age.
3. My full name is Damian Anthony BIDGOOD, I am a Constable in the Tasmania Police stationed at Search and Rescue Hobart.
4. On Sunday 19 September 1999 Constable's G PEARCE, P ALLAN, R STACEY, J PRATT, L STANLEY and myself attended the Australian Maritime College at Newnham, Tasmania. Our duties were to assist Detective Senior Constable S GRAY and Senior Constable D. UPSTON as safety divers and trial life rafts, harness' and safety lines used by yachting crew.
5. The first exercises, which were conducted, consisted of 15 people trained with life raft operation having to complete a number of exercises. Each person had to swim 50m then get into a 10-man life raft. After getting into the life raft there was another person in the raft with them, the role of this person was played by Constable's STACEY and PEARCE, to be an exhausted survivor. Another person in the pool played the role of an unconscious person in the water. It was the job of each of these 15 people to work out how to get the unconscious person back to the raft and into it. In the raft was a throw line, which could be used to assist with the recovery. Not all of the people used the throw line, some tried to swim the person back without it, some chose to send the exhausted survivor to swim out to the unconscious person. Getting the unconscious victim into the raft was attempted by some different methods showing to the people how hard it was. Most stayed in the water making it harder to push the victim in the raft.

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6. These 15 trained people were then required to individually get into another six-man life raft, which was inverted, with them in it. They were then required to get out of it without getting caught. After getting out they had to right the life raft and after righting the six-man raft they had to swim to the ten-man raft and right it. Due to the size of the ten-man raft this caused some difficulty for some people.
  7. The second exercise that was conducted on Sunday 19 September 99 were 15 untrained people in life rafts doing the same exercises as the trained people did. The same recovery methods were tried as by the trained people but some tried to paddle the life raft to the victim in the water. Some also found getting into the ten man raft difficult as they did not use the aids on the raft correctly. It was also noted that when inverted in the six-man raft some had difficulty getting out of the raft when it was inverted. Some twisted and got caught in the door, they were caught to the extent that if alone the circumstances could have led to drowning. During the righting exercises of both life rafts it was noted that a large number of these people could not correctly right the rafts. Being unaware of the correct technique, including having the inflation bottle on the near side to them, which could have caused injury to them when, righted if done with it on the far side.
  8. On Monday 20 September 99 the first exercise conducted was oxygen and carbon dioxide level testing in an inverted six man raft with five people in it. Constable's ALLAN, STACEY, STANLEY, PRATT and Mr T BOYLE entered the inverted raft with an air meter in it. Constable G PEARCE and myself were safety divers for this exercise. It took less than four minutes for the alarm to go off indicating that the CO2 level was at a dangerous level and all members had to exit the raft. This was repeated three more times, each time the alarm would activate approx 4 mins each time.
  9. The next exercise conducted on the 20 September 99 was inverting two types of six man life rafts, one being round and the other square. Beginning with one person in the raft inverted each time adding one person until five people was in the raft. I was one of the people in the raft each time it was inverted, the experience of being inverted in the raft was made harder when more people were in the raft. With three or more people it was found that occupants would end up lying across each other and at times this caused your head to lay in or under the water in the raft, for a exhausted person this could cause problems getting clear of the water. When there was three people in the raft it was noted that it seemed more difficult to right it than with four in it due to the twisting nature of the raft.
  10. Constable R STACEY and myself then began testing of release mechanisms for safety harness' and lines. For all the tests I was wearing wet weather clothing.
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11. The ease of using the equipment was rated from zero through to five, zero being impossible to achieve and five being easy to achieve.
12. The first set of equipment I tested was a Burke Lanyard YHB9, a Burke Yachtsman's Harness and Line YHB9. The PFD I was wearing was a Stormy Seas Yoke 0100. The first test this equipment consisted of releasing the Line from the chest connection, the level of difficulty was rated at one, the line could not be disconnected without using two hands. The next method was self-release from a block connection at the bottom of the pool. This was rated at three being moderate too release using finger with thumb to release. A number of drag tests were then conducted wearing this safety equipment. These tests consisted of being dragged the length of the pool and attempting to disconnect from the line. The first test self release with an uninflated PFD, this was rated at three moderate ease. The second drag test was being dragged with a coastal PFD, this was rated two being more difficult to release. The third drag test was being dragged side ways of the sidewall with a coastal PFD, this was rated zero impossible to achieve. The Stormy Seas PFD Yoke 0100, which was used for the static line testing, was rated at four for its level of difficulty to inflate and don. It was rated at five for its comfort in wearing.
13. The next test was conducted on the 21 September 99 whilst wearing wet weather gear was with a stormy seas Yoke 0100 PFD, a Burke Yachtsman Harness YHB7 and a Burke Lanyard 227197 model 17.9. The self-release test from the chest connection was rated a two less than moderate to use, using thumb and hand to release. The self-release test from the lanyard at the block was rated four easy to use, using thumb and first finger to release. The first drag test conducted with uninflated PFD was rated at one released using thumb and first finger. The drag test wearing a coastal PFD was rated at zero as I failed to release the lanyard. The last drag test being dragged sideways was the wall was rated at zero as I failed again to release the lanyard.
14. The last pool test I conducted on the 21 September 99 was wearing wet weather gear with a Stormy Seas Full Jacket FO16537 which came with a integral harness FO16537, the lanyard was a non standard approved lanyard. The lanyard had a release mechanism, which was operated by a line connected to a quick release buckle. At two locations along the lanyard was a flap, which enabled access to the release line to activate the release buckle. The first self-release test from the chest was rated at three moderate to operate, initial difficulty was found in locating the flap. The second self-release test from the block was rated at four, the lower flap easier to locate. The first drag test conducted was with the Stormy Seas jacket not inflated, rated at four. The second drag test being dragged from the wall side ways was rated at ~~five easy to use~~

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15. It was noted and trialed that when the lanyard was twisted the string release close to the chest did not want to release the mechanism.
16. On the afternoon of Tuesday 21 September 99 sea trials were conducted using both the square and round six man life rafts. The rafts were taken to into Bass Strait off the entrance to the Tamar River near Low Head. The Police Vessel Van Diemen was used to transport the rafts and equipment.
17. The first testing was boarding with the square raft, I was one of five people in the water getting into the raft. The level of difficulty experienced with getting into the raft was moderate. Following the boarding testing was entering and exiting the raft whilst it was inverted. The level of difficulty was again moderate, the door on this raft was a long sleeve and had to be held apart by other members in the water. The next exercise was inverting the raft the correct way starting with one person and working up to five people in the raft. The ease at righting myself in the raft as it was inverted was easy with one or two people in it. But from three to five people this was more difficult due to the confined space in the raft. It was found that there was not enough room to manoeuvre inside the raft and people would get tangled up with one another and I experienced and witnessed other members experience having your head stuck in the water in the raft. As we were in good health and not fatigued it was not difficult to free yourself, but for a person fatigued and suffering exposure this would be a considerable effort.
18. The raft was then inverted with myself and four other people getting in the raft. A hole was cut in the floor of the raft simulating what the crew of Winston Churchill had done. The raft was then inverted and the floor stood on until it started ripping. The initial ripping was from one side to the other, the floor then ripped along the sides until it completely separated from the tubing, this took little time to separate. The raft was then inverted onto its roof and this was stood on until the roof began to separate from the tubing, the roof finally separating completely.
19. The round six-man raft was then placed into the water and the same tests were carried out with this raft. The first test boarding the raft was again moderately easy to accomplish. The entering and exit from the raft inverted was easy as the door on this raft was wide and there was less loose material in the way. The inverting tests with one or two people were easy to position yourself. With three or more people the same experience was found as with the square raft. The crowded conditions made it difficult to position yourself and I found once again my head would get stuck under the water inside the raft.

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20. It was also noted that the wide door on the raft made it difficult for the people near the door to position themselves so as not to fall out while the raft was inverted. This would not be a problem with the door closed.
21. The raft was then inverted and a hole cut in the floor of it, the floor was then stood on to test how long it would take to rip. I noticed that it took more effort and time to rip the floor on this raft, but once it started ripping the floor eventually ripped completely away from the tubing. The roof of the raft was then stood and until it ripped away from the tubing, this again taking more time than the square raft.
22. The final testing with the rafts was to simulate the ability to sit on the tubing of the rafts in rough conditions. The method used was to create waves with the Police Vessel Van Diemen. With both rafts I experienced difficulty in staying on the tubing and most times fell off, when hit by the 1m wave, which was produced, from the Van Diemen. I also noticed that the square raft could not hold its shape without the floor, with the five of us sitting on it, making it difficult to sit on. The round raft held its shape more easily in this circumstance.
23. The final test I conducted was to be dragged by the Van Diemen and attempt to release myself wearing wet weather clothing, the Burke YHB7 harness and the lanyard with the line release mechanism. The first two attempts were unsuccessful but the final attempt I was successful in releasing. I noticed that the flap covering the line was difficult to locate and then open to expose the line. I noted that a plastic or similar tab on the end of the flap with Velcro or similar to keep it in place would make it more easy to locate and then open to expose the line. I also noted the line to be tight making it difficult to get my finger underneath it. This would be made easier if the line was made slightly longer to make it looser. Again this would be a difficult task to complete if exhausted with cold fingers and no strength.

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