

**New South Wales Police**

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

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

**Date:** 13 November 1999

---

**Name:** John William PRATT

**Address:** Police Search and Rescue, Hobart


**Tel. No.:** (03) 62302475

**Occupation:** Police Officer

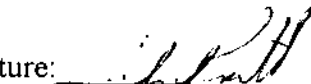
**STATES:-**

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 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 state in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.
2. I am 29 years of age.
3. My full name is John William PRATT and I am a Constable in the Tasmanian Police Service currently attached to the Police Marine and Rescue Service.
4. On Sunday 19 September 1999, in the company of Constable P. ALLAN, Constable D. BIDGOOD, Constable G. PEARCE, Constable R. STACEY and Constable L. STANLEY, I attended the Australian Maritime College at Newnham, Launceston, Tasmania. Our duties were to assist Detective Senior Constable S. GRAY and Senior Constable D. UPSTON with their enquiries in relation to the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race Investigation. These duties included acting as safety divers, trialing life rafts, trialing safety harnesses and safety lines that are used by crew members on yachts.

Witness:

  
Const 1272

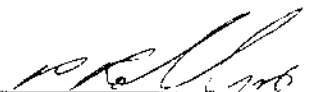
Signature:

  
CONST 1696

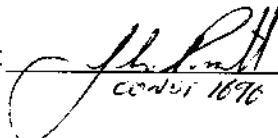
**Statement (continued) in the matter of:** Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race Investigation.  
**Name:** John William PRATT

5. The first life raft trial consisted of fifteen (15) people, all of whom had been trained in the use of life rafts participating in several life raft drills. Each person was required to swim 50m, whilst wearing wet weather gear and a life jacket, and then climb aboard a 10 man life raft. Once on board the life raft the person was required to deal with a 'man overboard' drill. Constables STACEY and PEARCE played the role of an exhausted survivor in the life raft, whilst another Constable played the role of an unconscious person in the pool. The task for each of the fifteen (15) people was to retrieve the unconscious person and get them back into the life raft.
6. Contained in the life raft was a 'throw line' which could be used to assist in the recovery of the unconscious person. Not all of the persons used the throw line. Some people tried to swim the victim back without it, others sent the exhausted survivor out to retrieve the victim.
7. There were several methods attempted, by the fifteen (15) persons, to get the victim into the life raft. Most of the fifteen (15) people stayed in the water and pushed the victim, making it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to get the victim into the life raft.
8. The fifteen (15) trained persons were then required to individually climb aboard a six man life raft. The persons were then required to secure the life raft, as they would in a real life situation. The life raft was then inverted with the person inside of it. The person was then tasked with exiting the life raft. Once out of the life raft the persons were then required to swim to an over turned 10 man lift raft an right it. Due to the size of the 10 man life raft some people had problems completing this task.
9. The participants then had to swim to a helicopter winching sling, place the sling on and then give the appropriate signal for them to be winched from the water. Most persons had difficulty in placing the sling over their heads due to the bulky nature of the life jackets that they were wearing.

Witness:

  
Const 1272

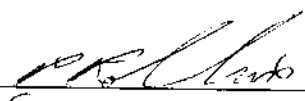
Signature:

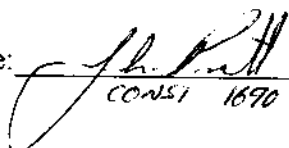
  
Const 1896

**Statement (continued) in the matter of: Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race Investigation.**  
**Name: John William PRATT**

10. The second part of this exercise was also conducted on Sunday 19 September 1999. This exercise involved fifteen (15) untrained persons completing exactly the same detail as the trained people. Whilst recovering the unconscious person some of the untrained people paddled the raft, using hands and paddles, to the victim. The untrained persons had great difficulty in righting the 10 man life raft as they did not use the righting aids correctly. When the untrained persons were exiting the overturned raft, many of them became entangled in the cords that are used to secure the entrance. The entanglement appeared to be caused by the persons exiting the raft head first, and also by them twisting as they exited. Had some of these people not been assisted during the period of their entanglement drowning would have been inevitable. A large number of the fifteen (15) untrained persons did not use the correct technique to right the rafts, and therefore experienced difficulties in completing the task. When righting the 10 man life raft several of the persons did so with the inflation bottle on the opposite side of the raft to them. This could have resulted in the bottle causing the persons injury during the righting of the raft. Whilst placing the helicopter sling on, once again, most persons experienced difficulties due to the bulky nature of the life jackets. One person sat in the sling in order to be lifted, and several others could not be winched from the water due to the sling being placed on incorrectly. Had winching continued, serious injury could have resulted.

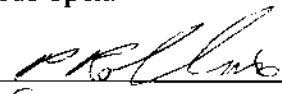
11. On Monday 20 September 1999 an exercise was conducted in order to test oxygen and carbon dioxide levels within an inverted 6 man life raft. A 6 man life raft was inverted, after which Constable ALLAN, Constable STACEY, Constable STANLEY, Mr. T. BOYLE and myself entered the life raft. During this exercise Constable BIDGOOD and Constable PEARCE acted as safety divers. An air sensor meter was placed inside the life raft. It took less then four (4) minutes for the alarm on the air sensor to be activated, indicating that the Carbon Dioxide level inside the raft had reached a dangerous level. The persons inside the raft were forced to exit from the raft. This exercise was conducted a further three times, and on each occasion the alarm would activate approximately four (4) minutes after the occupants had entered the raft.

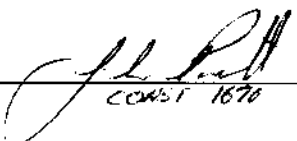
Witness:   
Const 1272

Signature:   
CONST 1690

**Statement (continued) in the matter of:** Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race Investigation.  
**Name:** John William PRATT

12. Also on Monday 20 September 1999, I participated in righting tests on a round 6 man life raft and a square 6 man life raft. These tests were conducted by first placing one (1) person inside the raft, and then righting it. An extra person was added on each occasion until five (5) persons were in the raft when it was righted. I was one of the persons inside the life rafts when they were being righted. When more than three persons were inside the life raft when it was righted, it was extremely uncomfortable, to the point of being dangerous for the occupants of the life raft. Each time the raft was righted about 40cm of water would cover the floor of the life raft. This meant that occupants in the raft, on righting, would be pinned under water, by the other occupants of the raft. This could easily have disastrous results if the persons inside the life raft were fatigued.
  
13. It was also apparent that when there were three (3) persons in the life raft it was more difficult to right than when there were four (4) or five (5) persons in the life raft. The extra persons appeared to stop the life raft from twisting out of shape, thus making it easier to right.
  
14. On the afternoon of Tuesday 21 September 1999 I participated in sea trials using both the square and round 6 man life rafts. These tests were conducted in Bass Strait off the entrance to the Tamar River near Low Head. The trials were conducted from the Police Vessel Van Diemen.
  
15. During the first test I was one of five (5) people in the water who was tasked with getting into the square life. During these test I was wearing a full wet suit, heavy duty wet weather bib and brace trousers, and a "coastal" buoyancy vest. Whilst it was awkward to gain entry to the life raft from the water, I would describe it as being only moderately difficult. However, I believe that it would be extremely difficult for a fatigued, cold, or injured person to gain entry to a raft in rough conditions.
  
16. The following test, again using the square life raft, involved entering a exiting the life raft whilst it was inverted. The door on this life raft had a long nylon sock and a quantity of cord around it. This made exiting the raft, whilst up side down, moderately difficult as I tended to become entangled in both the nylon sock and the cord. This problem was alleviated by other occupants of the raft holding the sock and cords open.

Witness:   
Const 1272

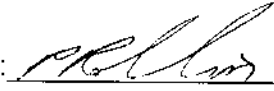
Signature:   
Const 1676

**Statement (continued) in the matter of:** Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race Investigation.

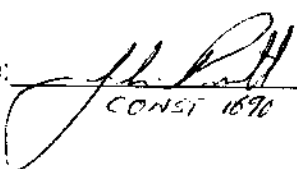
**Name:** John William PRATT

17. Righting tests were then conducted, again starting with one (1) person in the raft and adding a person each time until there were five (5) persons in the raft. Once again, with one (1) or two (2) people inside the raft, whilst it was being righted, was quite comfortable. With three (3), or more, persons inside the raft it was uncomfortable to the point of being dangerous. Occupants of the raft regularly had their heads pinned under water by the weight of the other occupants in the raft. On one occasion safety divers were required to untangle the legs of the occupants in the life raft before they could move properly. I believe that if the occupants of the life raft were in poor health, or fatigued, they would not be able to free themselves if one of them became pinned under the water that covers the floor of the life raft.
18. The life raft was then inverted with myself and four (4) others in it. A hole was then cut in the floor of the life raft, simulating what the crew of the Winston Churchill had done. The raft was turned then righted, and pressure was placed on the floor until it started ripping. The floor initially ripped, along the cut, from one side to the other. A short time later the floor ripped along the sides of the life raft. After a very short time the entire floor had separated from the life raft tubing. The life raft was then inverted so that the roof was used as a floor. After a short period of time the roof separated from the raft completely.
19. The round 6 man life raft was then placed in the water and the same tests were carried out as for the square life raft. Entering the life raft from the water was awkward, however only moderately difficult. Entering, and exiting the raft was made easier due to the fact that the door was a large flap, meaning that there was less loose material and cords obstructing the doorway. Whilst being righted, it was comfortable with one (1) or two (2) occupants, but was extremely uncomfortable, to the point of being dangerous with three (3) or more occupants. Once again, with more than three (3) occupants, persons in the life raft had their heads trapped under the water on the floor of the life raft by the weight of the other occupants.
20. The wide door area on the round life raft also made it difficult for the persons positioned near the doorway not to fall out during righting. This problem, obviously, did not occur when the door was shut.

Witness:

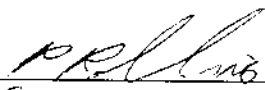
  
Const 1272

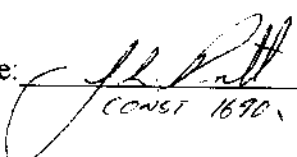
Signature:

  
CONST 1570

**Statement (continued) in the matter of: Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race Investigation.**  
**Name: John William PRATT**

21. The round life raft was then inverted and a hole cut in the floor of it. The life raft was then righted, and the floor walked on until it ripped. It took more time, and effort, to cause the floor of this raft to rip, however once it did rip, the floor completely separated from the life raft tubing. The life raft was then inverted and the roof stood on until it ripped. Once again the roof ripped completely away from the tubing, It did, however, take longer for this to occur on the round raft, than it did on the square raft.
22. The final test conducted with both life rafts was to use the tubing of the rafts in simulated rough conditions. The Van Diemen was used to create a wave of approximately one (1) metre in height. The tubing from both life rafts was extremely difficult to sit on especially with the waves present. On nearly every occasion that I was hit by the wave I fell from the tubing. It was evident that the square raft did not hold its shape without the floor being present. The round life raft was able to preserve its shape much more than the square one.
23. Once the floor and roof of the square life raft had been removed, there was a large amount of cord left attached to the tubing. On one occasion, after being knocked off the tubing by a wave, my legs became entangled in the cord and I became temporarily trapped under the life raft. With some effort I was able to free myself.
24. I am aware that all of the testing that I was involved in was recorded on a video recorder.
25. I was present, and observed, Constable BIDGOOD and Constable STACEY performing tests on numerous life lines and yachting harnesses.

Witness:   
Const 1272

Signature:   
CONST 1690