

King Island 2019 return passage - Arcadia Incident Report

The incident

It was almost a catastrophic incident, it was avoidable

Arcadia, an Archambault 40 skippered by Peter Davidson, hit a reef, believed to be Sea Elephant Reef, approximately 15Nm north of the Grassy Harbour on King Island whilst on the return journey from the 2019 King Island yacht race. The yacht had finished the race the previous evening and had stayed the night and attended presentation the next morning. All crew members were on board for the return journey.

The following is the account of Martin Vaughan, the ORCV Race Director (RD) who was on King Island at the time and became the ORCV Incident Manager. A full incident log is available in the ORCV SharePoint Race Director site.

- Arcadia with 8 persons on board hit the reef while believed to be under full sail, travelling approximately 7-8 knots on the return voyage. It resulted in the injury to one crew member and resulted in structural damage to the boat, causing water ingress.
- Crew were not wearing life jackets at the time. The injured crew member was at mast at the time preparing to reef the main. He was thrown several meters into a stanchion as a result of the impact, he was fortunate not to have gone overboard. Due to the reef and being on board a long keel yacht, Arcadia would have struggled to rescue the crew member.
- They contacted the ORCV Race Director who was fortunately still on the island. Details were established that the injury was relatively minor, a suspected broken bone and that there was some water ingress but it wasn't too bad.
- The RD immediately requested assistance from Assistant Race Director and trained Incident Management Team member Neville Rose as well as formally escalating it to the Incident Management Team Leader (Rik Head). All agreed that regardless of ORCV race responsibility boundaries we could assist and should assist.
- Whilst monitoring the vessel using mobile phone, the RD formed contingency plans with King Island Boat Club Commodore Duncan Porter. Plans were quickly put in place for a heavy runabout on standby in case there was a need for Arcadia to abandon ship. Pumps were organised and discussions made about the possibly of slipping or beaching the yacht on arrival if heavy water ingress eventuated. The hospital was put on notice (to open, it was closed at the time) and assistant IMT members upgraded the tracker interval and notified the boat emergency contact. A public statement was provided by the ORCV on web site and Facebook that there was an incident but all on board were safe and well.
- On arrival the RD briefly inspected the boat and observed cracking of keel matrix structure to hull lamination and seeping of salt water through the crack. The crew had sponges and buckets to monitor and bail out, inflow was slight. RD suggested they send in a swimmer for a look underwater but focused on getting the crew member to hospital.
- Using the KIBC Commodore's vehicle, the RD took the crew member to hospital where he was treated for suspected broken collar bone, provided pain relief and discharged.
- Informal conversations with the crew member indicated the likely cause of the collision was distraction (relating to the decision to reef the main) together with poor navigation oversight
- Another competitor, Vertigo witnessed the incident and rang the RD. They informed the RD that they had tried unsuccessfully to raise on VHF16 after noticing the track of Arcadia. They prepared themselves for a rescue, fearing the worst. They had later offered to stand by.

The attempt to depart

A stressful, challenging dilemma for the ORCV

- Whilst at the hospital the RD took a call from a KIBC member who was assisting them, saying that Arcadia were preparing to leave and head back to Melbourne.
- The RD is also a SSSC Revalidation course instructor who uses the Cheeky Rafiki incident as a case study. Knowing about that case and the fact Arcadia would now have no other competitors nearby to assist if they got into trouble and knowing a head wind was forecast to strengthen, the RD decided to intervene.
- It should be noted that at this stage the RD was officially powerless, this was post-race.
- The RD expressed extreme concern due to very real risk of total keel structure failure in building wind conditions and the catastrophic consequence if it did. Asked if they had dived on it to inspect, they indicated nobody wanted to as it was too cold.
- When it was clear they still wanted to go, RD got them to acknowledge a formal statement from him (he was also the club Commodore) to the effect the ORCV considers leaving an unnecessary and extreme risk. In ORCV's opinion they should not leave.
- After subsequent discussion amongst the crew they changed their decision and decided to stay at least for the night.
- On return to the club the RD had discussed the matter at length with them. Most of the crew decided to fly home the next day while the skipper and two others intended to motor back on the Wednesday in lighter weather.
- Relieved, the RD recommended:
 - If they did go, have the liferaft ready to deploy and remain on deck at all times with a grab bag with them and stay in PFDs
 - The skipper should contact his shipwright at Sandringham Yacht Club, and ask his opinion. The shipwright subsequently told him "do not go"
 - The skipper should contact his insurer, it would be a claim anyway and they should take responsibility. The RD suggested he contact a fellow skipper friend of theirs who had just gone through the process after rudder loss in the Sydney to Hobart. The insurer subsequently took on the responsibility of getting it back to the mainland.
- The RD and injured crew member spent the night at the KIBC Commodore's house and flew home the following day. The ORCV lost the fare on Rex as a result despite requesting consideration.
- The RD had just spent two days, with little sleep managing the race, so was tired going into the incident.

Interesting questions for Australian Sailing

Where does an Organising Authority's boundaries lie in respect to return voyage incidents ?

Why is it that experienced boats let their guard down on the way to or from a race ?