Two Rescues in One Day

Fortunately the majority of Australian boaters take safety seriously, consequently the incidence of major marine accidents are relatively few and far between, so the events of January 18 2012 were extraordinary to say the very least.

Firstly we received notification that a GME MT400 emergency beacon had been activated by the Cairns bound yacht Empress III, which ran into trouble transiting North Queensland’s Great Barrier Reef around 120 kms south of Cape York.

AMSA’s Rescue Coordination centre in Canberra notified a passing merchant vessel the RTM Piiramu of the incident and diverted the UK registered bulk carrier to the stricken yacht’s position. Arriving at the scene Piiramu subsequently launched a life boat to recover the two grateful crew members and their Scottish terrier Missy. The trio were transported to the port of Weipa.

The second and potentially catastrophic incident occurred later in the same day; when the twin-hulled vessel Deep Blue, returning with a party of 9 males from a dive trip on the scuttled former frigate HMAS Adelaide off the NSW Central Coast. Approaching the northern entrance to Pittwater’s Broken Bay, the recently purchased 6.5 metre charter vessel capsized when hit from behind by a rogue wave. All 9 occupants were instantly thrown into the water, sensing the gravity of the situation, one of the men dived under the upturned hull to recover and activate the GME MT400 EPIRB.

The EPIRB emergency signal was relayed to the Australian RCC; where the duty officer determined the identity of signal and immediately instigated a search and rescue mission.

Guided by the EPIRB’s homing signal a NSW rescue helicopter and
Stebercraft water police launch 24 were tasked to proceed to the location of the distressed Deep Blue, her crew and passengers. Simultaneously an overflying aircraft detected the MT400’s signal and upon investigation sighted an overturned vessel with a number of people wearing wetsuits clinging to its hull.

The police vessel recovered the survivors and transferred them to the Pittwater water police base where they were examined by paramedics and allowed home.