

History of the Great Barrier Island Rescue Trust – Coastguard

Roger Bright, April 2019

The story of Coastguard Great Barrier Island began circa 1997-98 when local man, Kevin Reynolds, was asked by the 01 Marine Radio Operator, George Mason, to go around and tow a boat off the rocks. Kevin took his small open topped aluminium pontoon boat around to the area, only to be confronted by a 45 foot boat, stuck hard and fast. With the help of the tide, the vessel was removed from the rocks and towed into Tryphena harbour. This was essentially the first time it became clear that Great Barrier would benefit from having a dedicated rescue vessel on the island.

This wasn't the only time Kevin used his own resources to help those in need. Kevin also towed a vessel owned by Jamie Peters into the harbour one night, after he ran into an issue on board. Kevin's assistance resulted in Jamie donating a healthy \$10K to the island's rescue vessel cause. The 'rescue trust' process started to materialise just after I started on the island in 1999.

With Search and Rescue being a Police responsibility, I soon noticed the lack of a dedicated Marine Search and Rescue organisation on Great Barrier Island, but was aware of the endeavours of a few, to start up the dedicated rescue trust. The likes of Peter Ganley and Barry Kearney (to name but a couple) and the other commercial fishing vessels, would always avail themselves for any maritime search and rescue. At the time they were the backbone of a number of rescues and searches, that without these dedicated volunteers and their vessels, would have surely cost lives.

As mentioned, Kevin Reynolds in his little aluminium boat, would also avail himself where he could, to assist in helping others. He and his then neighbour, Sam Opie, a local school teacher at the time, soon became very involved in the Search and Rescue scene. The pair formed a trust and started to apply for donations and funding to assist with the running of Kevin's boat, aptly named *Cold Comfort*, for the purpose of SAR.

Kevin and Sam encouraged some pretty big names around the island to get involved with the trust. Myself, Kevin's wife Merilee, who acted as our Secretary for a number of years, and a large number of other like-minded people who wanted to help others, joined. All this effort was in a voluntary capacity.

Soon after, the "Great Barrier Island Coastal Rescue Service Charitable trust" (GBICRSCT) was born and became the first port of call for most marine SAR operations around the island. We continued with the support of the earlier operators, but the formation of the GBICRSCT allowed those other commercial operators to concentrate on their businesses.

On September 20 2001, the GBICRSCT purchased a second hand 6.8mtr Stabi craft with a personal loan taken out by Kevin, Sam and their wives. This became the island's first dedicated rescue vessel named, *Rangitawhiri*. We had her until early 2006 until we purchased another vessel and she was sold.

Soon after, we purchased a second hand 8.5 metre 'Protector,' due to the increasing demand for our crew and vessel. We raised enough money to purchase the vessel, but we soon realised the vessel was too small to handle the sea conditions we were heading out in, so the decision was made to fund a bigger boat.

In early to mid-2005, the committee decided to try and source a dedicated rescue boat building and office and so once again we found ourselves fundraising. Thanks to huge amounts of enthusiasm and effort, we raised the money and purchased the old Mountain Air building from the airport and had it transported to

its current location on the Tryphena wharf. This meant that more of our training evenings could be held down at the wharf instead of the local Police station.

It was soon after this, on Wednesday October 26 2005, that I put forward a motion to a special general meeting, called specifically for the purpose of changing our name to Great Barrier Island Coastguard Rescue Incorporated (GBICRI). This was needed to finalise the transfer of assets and finances to Coastguard, whom we were in the process of gifting our assets to and becoming a unit of.

The application was then made to have our name change registered with the Companies Office, which took place on November 7 2005. On this day we became an official Coastguard New Zealand unit, known as "Barrier Coastguard Rescue" or "Barrier Rescue" for short.

Over the next 14 odd months, our crew went through some pretty intensive training with Coastguard. During this time a few of us passed our assessments and gained our Masters and Senior Masters Qualifications. A number of the local volunteers including Wayne Sanderson, who is still with the unit today, also achieved various crew level qualifications.

During this time, our committee worked hard to purchase our current local Rescue vessel. Our desire was to own, what we considered to be, the best sized vessel for the conditions we faced in and around the island. So when one of the Team New Zealand 12.5 metre chase boats from one of the America's Cup challenges became available, we jumped at the chance. On June 23 2006, our offer was accepted by Rayglass and we purchased *Awhina*.

We have had our rescue boats moored in a number of locations, from Little Shoal Bay out in front of Kevin and Merilee's house, to Whangaparapara and then to the Tryphena area on borrowed moorings. This was prior to our unit getting its own "moor 4 u." The current plan is to have our vessels on poles at the Tryphena wharf, which we have been granted consent for. All that needs to happen now is for the poles to be installed and an access way designed and built.

Our unit has recently gone through a massive period of training supported by the fantastic trainers from Coastguard. Along with the recent trainees, the unit is slowly but surely looking better and better. Our crew is working their way through the training process and hopefully the end result will be that we are spoilt for skippers and crew. This will allow us to continue delivering our incredible service around the island. Many people have put a lot of time and effort into our unit, because they understand just how important our service is within our community.

To all those who have worked alongside Coastguard over the last 19 odd years, putting in so much time and effort – thank you. It has been an absolute pleasure and privilege working with you all. I have personally learnt a lot not only about boating, but about the incredible people who work in volunteer organisations like ours.

